



# Al-Ahram

Weekly



Netanyahu, portrait of the week by George Bahgory...p.8

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## Orient House meetings

FAISAL Husseini, a prominent member of the PLO Executive Council, met with diplomatic representatives from the US, British, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Turkish, Greek consulates, as well as the Vatican at the Orient House, the PLO's headquarters in Jerusalem. The incoming Israeli right-wing Likud government seeks to close down the office.

Following the meeting, which was held on Tuesday, Husseini warned that closing the Orient House would destroy the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. He added that the peace process is destined to fail if the issue of Jerusalem is not part of the agreement.

Husseini also had his first meeting on the same day with a representative of Prime Minister-Elect Benjamin Netanyahu. Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo, a moderate who is not part of Netanyahu's right-wing entourage, said that he met with Husseini after consulting with Netanyahu's leading advisor. Roni later called on Netanyahu to meet directly with Arafat.

# 'It takes two to tango'

Overdue, yet timely, the first Arab summit will focus on Arab solidarity and peace. Iraq, however, is not invited, writes Nevine Khalil

All but one of the leaders of the Arab world will meet face-to-face for a full scale summit in Cairo next week, but the threat of a potentially hawkish right-wing Israeli government is not the only reason. Statements issued from Cairo last week stressed that promoting Arab solidarity was also the focus of the summit.

The two issues, however, beget one another. Netanyahu's victory in the 29 May Israeli general elections, and the political implications of the incoming government's ideological sway has left Arabs apprehensive, fearing that the peace process will be derailed. Consequently, in the aftermath of the elections, several Arab mini-summits have been held. The ramifications of Netanyahu's victory and the prospects for peace were high on the agenda of three mini-summits, the first between the leaders of Egypt and Syria, the second Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians — the three parties that have already signed agreements with Israel and the third between Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Last Saturday, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, three Arab heavyweights, announced in Damascus that a pan-Arab summit would be held on 21 June, with the aim being "to close Arab ranks" and support the peace process. Out of the 22 Arab League members, only Iraq is not invited. President Hosni Mubarak, responsible for sending out invitations, has contacted the leaders of Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Oman, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Sudan, Mauritania, the Comoros Islands and Djibouti. Somalia, which does not have a recognised government, will probably be represented by its diplomatic mission in Cairo.

The Cairo summit will be the first of its kind since 10 August, 1990, when Arab leaders met after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Mubarak said "because of the current circumstances we put off the question of Iraq until a later date because of continuing sensitivities." But while Iraq has lodged no official protest at not being invited, neither have any of the other Arab leaders. In fact, Kuwait has applauded Iraq's absence, signifying that the Arab world has yet to heal the deep rifts ensuing from the Gulf crisis.

There is hope however for resolving other inter-Arab disputes like Syria's strained relations with the Jordanians and Palestinians for signing separate peace accords with Israel. Egypt and Sudan too might have a chance to clear the air between them, after the latter was accused of plotting to assassinate Mubarak last year.

In an exclusive to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel-Meguid said it is "a golden rule" that in time of crisis the Arabs stand together. He added that the "situation is seriously threatening the peace process and we should all work to maintain the momentum and accelerate the peace process."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said that the summit was both "an action and a reaction", aimed at restoring Arab solidarity and responding to Israel's potential hardline positions. "We will give Netanyahu the benefit of the doubt [and a few] weeks to know where he stands," Moussa said, adding that the peace process is not a "platonic relationship" and that Israel has to show its commitment through actions. Moussa assured that Arabs do not want to antagonise Israel, "but it takes two to tango".

Asked by the *Weekly* whether the summit reflects Arab anxiety or resolve, Egypt's foreign minister said: "We are making a point, and we are worried about the peace, not by the Israeli government." Moussa rejected the paradox that it was Netanyahu who will unite the Arabs. "No [Netanyahu] did not bring the Arabs together," he said, noting that an Arab gathering was "overdue".

Arab foreign ministers are due to meet in Cairo on the eve of the summit to study the agenda prepared by Egypt. The pan-Arab summit will discuss Arab reconciliation, means to pursue the peace process based on the land-for-peace principle and outline arrangements for Arab national security in the light of recent developments in the region. Netanyahu, busy forming his government, did not comment on the summit.

Senior Egyptian officials said that the summit will not call upon Arab nations to freeze normalising relations with Israel, unless Israel is inflexible. Israel has already jeopardised its fledgling relations with Qatar and Oman, the only Gulf states to begin normalising relations with Israel through trade links. Both of the Arab states have threatened to revise their position if Israel backtracks on its commitment to a fair and comprehensive peace.

"We are not here to threaten or to confront people with a fait accompli. We remain open and hopeful," Osama El-Bar, Mubarak's top political adviser, said about the summit. He added that if Israel changes its position "this will be discussed in a calm, objective, logical fashion, without hysterics, threats and insults."

In a tactical move, the Likud party circulated what it called a softer version of its hardline draft policy, which earlier had alarm bells ringing in the Arab world and the US. Arabs ventured that the first draft policy amounted to "a declaration of war". The revised draft did not specify a return of the Golan to Syria, but ambiguously stated that "the government views the Golan Heights as a region vital for the security of the state". Otherwise, the modified draft was very similar to its predecessor, still ruling out the creation of a Palestinian state and calling for the expansion of Jewish settlements.

The Clinton administration, preoccupied with the upcoming presidential elections, took one out to confirm its commitment to the peace process. President Bill Clinton urged Mubarak, over the phone, to be patient.

According to a White House spokeswoman, Mubarak reportedly answered: "No one will rush to judgment." Clinton will be meeting with his Egyptian counterpart at the end of next month, and today is expected to receive Jordan's King Hussein, the first Arab leader to go to Washington since Netanyahu's victory. The prime minister-elect is due in the US on 25 June.

Israeli President Ezer Weizman also called on Arab nations to reserve judgment on Netanyahu, assuring them that Israel's right-wing leader will pursue the peace process.

On his part, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat remains optimistic. Addressing the Palestinian negotiating team this week he said: "A Palestinian state will be created, God willing."

## Mubarak agrees to intervene

President Mubarak responded to journalists' appeals for his arbitration of their dispute with the government, revealed Ibrahim Nafie at a Press Syndicate General Assembly yesterday. Mona El-Nahas attended



(L-R) Nafie briefs the Assembly on developments; Al-Wafd chief editor Gamal Badawi lauds the council, and its chairman's courage; Sid-Ahmed sheds off his usual calm

Amid uproarious applause, Press Syndicate Chairman Ibrahim Nafie yesterday announced his resignation before the Extraordinary General Assembly of the syndicate, meeting for the eighth time since June 1995. Attended by hundreds of journalists, and held against a backdrop of the collective resignation announced by the members of the syndicate's council on Monday, yesterday's meeting was reminiscent of the fiery assembly of 10 June last year, with which the journalists launched their year-long battle against a restrictive law on publication offences, Law 93. The journalists have since declared 10 June Egypt's Press Day, which they celebrated for the first time this week.

Nafie opened yesterday's General Assembly meeting with a report on the syndicate council's efforts to have Law 93, which journalists consider an attack on press freedom, repealed. He also briefed the assembly on the collective resignation of the 12 council members, and read out their letter of resignation, submitted to him earlier in the week. He reserved his bomb-shell till the end of his opening remarks, announcing his own resignation. It was solved however that the assembly would not decide on Nafie's and the council's resignations until its coming meeting scheduled for next Wednesday.

For over a year, Nafie said, journalists have been exercising restraint, exploring to the full every possible avenue for dialogue with governmental bodies, in order to have Law 93 repealed and a new law, guaranteeing press freedom and properly balancing the rights and duties of the press and journalists, enacted in its place. "All this was to no avail," said Nafie.

The resignations reflected Nafie's, and the council's, intense frustration with the way a new draft press law was debated, and approved, in both the Shura Council and the People's Assembly's Media and Culture Committee. Prepared by a governmental committee, which included a minority of journalists' representatives, the draft fell short of meeting the minimum of the journalists' demands. Efforts by

journalist members of the Shura Council, including Nafie, to introduce amendments favouring press freedom were met with hostility in both parliamentary houses. Both the Shura Council and the People's Assembly's Media and Culture Committee approved the draft without agreeing to a single amendment proposed by the Press Syndicate.

The full People's Assembly is due to debate the draft on Saturday.

Nafie had another bomb-shell up his sleeve, however, and near the end of the meeting, revealed that he had met with President Hosni Mubarak on Tuesday evening, and that the president had shown understanding for the journalists' apprehensions regarding Law 93 and responded to their call for his intervention before the new draft is enacted.

According to Nafie, Mubarak asserted that the new law should be such as to realise its aim in guaranteeing the freedom of the press, without fear of punishment, while upholding the society's values and safeguarding the dignity and rights of citizens.

The journalists, resolving to continue their struggle until "the infamous Law 93" was repealed in total, decided to give dialogue one last chance. In its final resolutions, the assembly decided to send a Press Syndicate delegation to the People's Assembly on Saturday to meet with Parliament Speaker Fathi Sorour, before formal discussions of the draft law by the full house are kicked off. As a show of solidarity with their representatives, hundreds of journalists announced they will gather before the parliament's gates at the same time.

The assembly also resolved to postpone approval of a "code of ethics" prepared by the syndicate until an equitable press law was issued. The assembly recommended that the open-ended sit-in, which started at the headquarters of the Press Syndicate on Monday, continue. It also invited all journalists to participate in a three-hour sit-in on Sunday that will be supervised by the syndicate's council.

Some 17 speakers took the floor during the General Assembly discussions, all expressing their de-

termination to continue the fight against Law 93 and insistence of the freedom of the press. Salah Eissa, a former member of the Syndicate's council who has emerged during the past year as its most fiery orator, opened his remarks by declaring "I am proud to be a journalist". Eissa lauded the courage and determination shown during the year-long struggle by the journalists, their council and chairman. It was a battle for freedom and democracy which journalists fought on behalf of the whole nation. Eissa said.

He called upon President Mubarak to intervene before it was too late. There were some in positions of authority who wanted to tarnish Mubarak's presidency, and associate it with dictatorship and repression, Eissa said.

Political analyst Mohamed Sid-Ahmed shed off his usual calm, warning that "the state will have to bear the responsibility, before the people and posterity, for acting to paralyse the press at one of the most critical stages in the history of our area."

(for more details, see p.3)

## PLC protest

THE 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council yesterday delayed its first session in protest of Israel's demand that 22 Gaza legislators undergo a check-point search. The legislators refused to submit to what they said were humiliating checks.

## Key suspect

BAHRAINI authorities yesterday announced the arrest of a key suspect in what is alleged to be an Iranian-backed plot to overthrow the government of this Gulf state.

Bahraini officials revealed that Jaafar Ali Hussain, a grocer residing in the Shi'ite Muslim village of Sanabis, and seven of his accomplices, were arrested by authorities, and were charged with the purchase and import of arms and ammunition into the country during the 18 months of unrest.

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## Culture for the masses



Determined to stress the value of culture, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak launched a fresh round of the Reading For All campaign and inaugurated a recently restored Mameluke house. Rania Khalaf reports

A public library in every neighborhood and a good book in the hands of every individual: these are the basic objectives of the five-year-old Reading For All campaign, sponsored by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak.

This week, under the comprehensive slogan "Reading for Children, Young People and the Family", Mrs Mubarak opened the sixth annual festival of her dedicated campaign.

This year's campaign will focus on the publishing and distribution of classics of Arabic and foreign literature. "This is considered as one of the biggest cultural projects in Egypt's modern history," said Mrs Mubarak. She praised the project for "opening new horizons for families, because millions of copies [of hundreds of titles] will be available in urban and rural governorates."

Over the last five years the number of libraries built or sponsored for inclusion in the Reading For All campaign has almost tripled. This year the public will have access to over 15,000 libraries.

Cultural and youth centres will also take part in this year's festival, in addition to

mobile libraries, each with a large number of titles and new releases on its shelves, and 100 "hospital libraries" that will cater for children's wards.

And in an effort to embark on issues of public concern, the Reading For All committee will introduce two new series about Islam. Enlightenment and *Muhammadiyah* (the traditions of Prophet Mohamed) have been chosen by the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) and *Al-Azhar* to highlight the contribution of prominent Islamic figures to Islamic civilisation.

Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif stressed the importance of these series in underscoring the true spirit of Islam and countering the rise of religious extremism among young people.

To add colour to the campaign, "cultural caravans" will travel in villages and small rural towns to give artistic performances to children, said Hussein Mahran, head of the General Organisation for Cultural Palaces.

Following another cultural avenue, Mrs Mubarak this week inaugurated the newly renovated Mameluke house of Zehab Khatoun. The opening ceremony was the

culmination of over a decade of work by restorers from the Higher Council for Antiquities.

Built in 1468, the three-storey building, located in the heart of Medieval Cairo and divided into the *harameik* (women's wing) and *salameik* (men's wing), is a good example of houses of that era.

It is also one of the wealth of architectural landmarks built in the old city by the Mamelukes and the Ottomans. Most of these gems have been falling into serious disrepair due to neglect and lack of restoration. Some of them have been completely destroyed by the effects of unplanned urban development.

The HCA, together with foreign archaeological centres in Egypt, have restored some buildings. But the vast majority of these monuments of Islamic cultural history remain under serious threat, and some concerned archaeologists and anthropologists believe it will only be a few decades before the entire old city tumbles down.

Calls for Mrs Mubarak to sponsor a campaign for the preservation of Islamic Cairo have come from many quarters.

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# Vigilant calm

Calm and a semblance of normalcy are returning to Upper Egypt. But as Dina Ezzat finds out, in both Minya and neighbouring Assiut a tight security grip remains in force

In the fields and on the streets of towns and villages in Minya and Assiut governorates, farmers are harvesting their crops, students are taking their final exams and families are spending their evenings on the corniche. On the surface, it seems both governorates have been finally freed from the harrowing fallout of the battle between security forces and Islamist militants.

But less than 30km south of Minya city, armoured cars laden with security men, automatic rifles at the ready, tour the roads regularly. Some are even permanently stationed at the entrances of villages where police believe militants may be hiding.

"We come and go. Things seem normal, but we do not know if the clashes between the [militant] groups and the police will break out again," said one housewife who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The incidence of violence, in Minya, is decreasing," said Maj. Gen. Sami Abdel-Gawad, chief of security in Minya. According to statistics from his department, the first five months of last year witnessed 88 incidents of either militant attacks of police-militant clashes. During the first five months of this year, however, there have been only 25 incidents.

"But we still have to be very careful," Abdel-Gawad emphasised. For the last two years, Minya has been the scene of fierce gun battles between militants and the police. During that period, the security forces burned down hundreds of sugar cane fields where militants hid and launched their attacks. The destruction of the fields has meant economic disaster for thousands of villagers.

And it was only six weeks ago that the police lifted the 18-month long curfew on the city of Mallawi and its neighbouring villages, where the vast majority of sugar cane fields were burned.

In the village of Edga, some 35km west of Mallawi, people say that life is slowly returning to normal. "It took us a while, after the curfew was lifted, to feel secure again," said one peasant who asked that his name be withheld. "But now I go to my field at about 7am and spend a normal working day," he added.

But the police are not taking any chances. Police check points surround the village from almost every side, and it seems that nearly every other house has at least one armed policeman stationed on its roof. And at the end of every street, the security forces have built a wall to block the exit of militants who are trying to escape. No stranger can enter the village unless they identify themselves and the purpose of their visit to the policemen on duty.

"They [the police] say we can keep our shops open as late as we want," said one village shop owner. "But we know we still need to be careful, so I tend to close after sunset. It is safer this way," he added.

"So long as we have terrorists at large we must be very careful. We cannot leave anything to chance," said Abdel-Gawad. According to his own estimates, there are "between 35 and 38 dangerous terrorists" at large.

Some villagers say they are unhappy that the failure of the police to arrest the militants is causing a prolonged state of anxiety.

Nadi Adib is a member of the sizeable Coptic population of the village of El-Hour, a few kilometres south of Edga. While praising the good and "cordial" relations between Muslims and Copts in his village, Adib believes that Copts are "a rather obvious target of the terrorists". He added: "The main tar-

get for the terrorists is the police, but they also try to attack Copts to instigate feelings of animosity between Copts and Muslims in the village, and thus embarrass the police."

"People [in the villages] suffer because of this situation," said Ahmed Abdel-Malek, a spokesman for the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights in Minya. "They feel that they should not be included in this war. They just want to lead a normal life."

Symptoms of discontent vary from one person to another. Farmers complain that sometimes they cannot go to their fields. Housewives say that after any incident the police put the village under temporary curfew and they cannot go out to do their daily shopping or send their children to school. Microbus drivers complain that they are subject to daily police questioning. A common criticism is that the security forces tend to be insensitive or even heavy-handed.

But the Minya security chief believes that since police officers are prepared to die to fight the militants' "attempts to terrorise everyone", civilians need to show more understanding towards the strict security measures and police attitudes. "We are trying everything we can to arrest the terrorists but this [Islamist militants'] organisation has had years to grow and cannot be defeated in 24 hours. However, the police are on full alert."

There is also the crucial problem of the militants' access to arms. The police say that they are checking up on all arms dealers, both licensed and illegal, to make sure that weapons are not finding their way into the militants' hands.

"But it takes more than the police to counter these groups," stressed Abdel-Gawad. He requests the "full cooperation" of villagers to end the battle.

But many villagers are hesitant to cooperate with the police. According to Fathallah Khafagi, secretary-general of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party chapter in Minya, cooperation is almost impossible. Not only are the militants the children, relatives and neighbours of the villagers, Khafagi explained, but the security forces use a network of questionable informants. And there is always the fear of revenge from militants who would not hesitate to shoot dead anyone they suspect of being an informer.

In Assiut it is more or less the same story. The original militant botched, Assiut witnessed bitter fighting from late 1991 to late 1994, before militants moved their battle to Minya.

Today, the villages of Assiut witness a few "small incidents" every month. But security is still very tight. In the heart of the city, armoured vehicles patrol 24 hours a day.

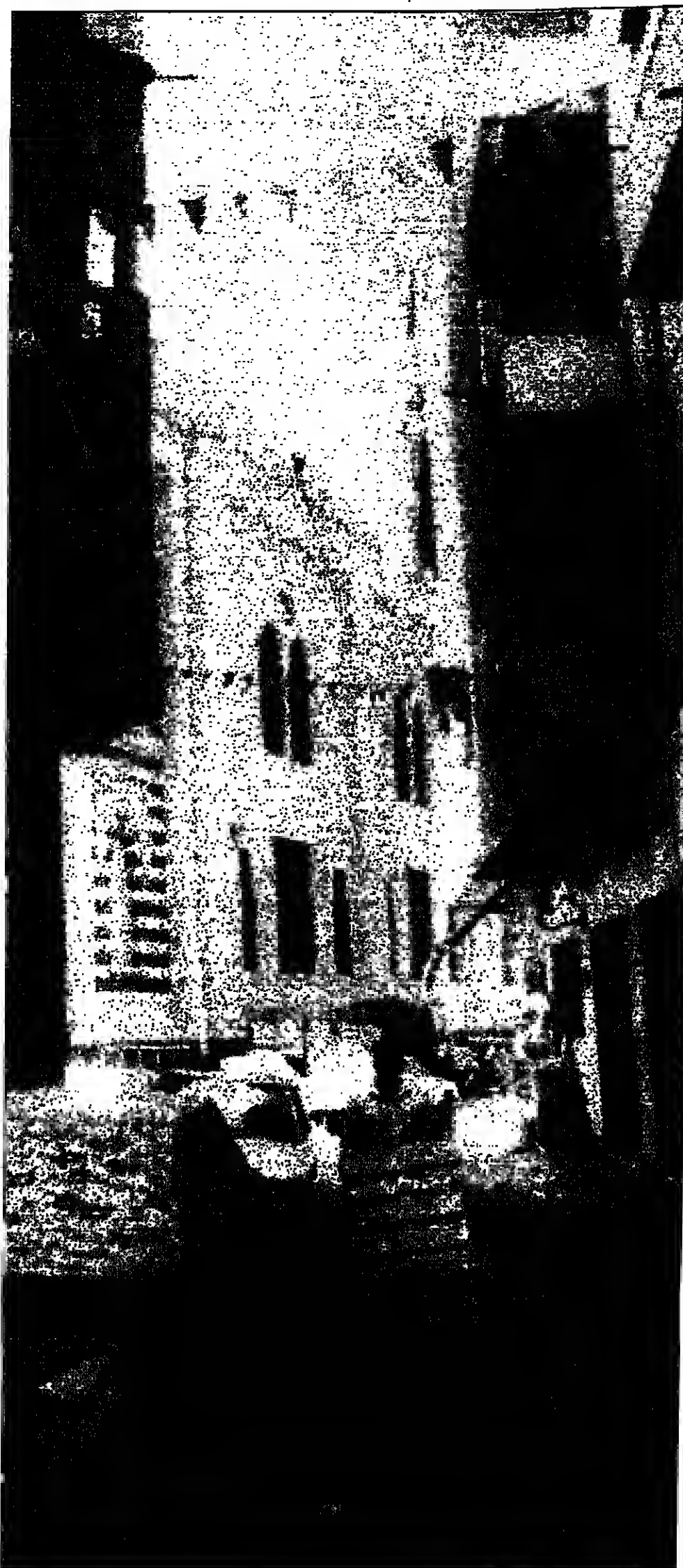
"These measures are the obvious deterrents," said Mohamed Raga'i El-Tahlawi, governor of Assiut.

In the governorate's southern villages of El-Badari and Sabel Selim, some residents express concern that the militants may come back from Minya. "You know they started here. They could come back again," said one.

But the governor dismisses the possibility. "They [the militants] would find it impossible to come back here. We will not let them do it. We will fight them every step of the way," he vowed.

El-Tahlawi's battle against the militants is not purely based on security measures. "Rather the opposite," he said. "It is based on development."

El-Tahlawi is working hard to build new factories, reclaim a wider agricultural zone and create new job opportunities. To implement this scheme, El-Tahlawi is lobbying to encourage investors of Assiut origin to pump their money into the development of the governorate.



## Neighbourhood anxiety

An ambitious project to renovate Dar El-Kutub, home to a treasure trove of historic documents, was met with national acclaim. But, as Mariz Tadros finds out, the neighbours are worried

"Just tell us the truth so that we can get on with our lives, once and for all," pleaded Mohamed Hassan Mohamed Khalifa, who owns a workshop for engraving metal nameplates. Khalifa lives and works near Dar El-Kutub, the national library currently undergoing an ambitious restoration programme under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak.

Not only is the building to be modernised and upgraded, but the surrounding area, in the heart of densely populated Bab El-Khalq, is to be beautified. Plans include the creation of a large car park, and the renovation of buildings surrounding the library.

But while the project promises to bring prestige to the area, residents are worried that their land will be taken and livelihoods lost. Among the residents and traders of the area, the atmosphere is tense as unconfirmed rumours spread about just how many of the existing buildings will be demolished to make way for the scheme.

"You can renovate Dar El-Kutub in whatever way you like, but leave us — the people living here — alone so that we can earn our living in peace," said Khalifa. "If you want to renovate the buildings around Dar El-Kutub, fine... but don't go demolishing our homes and workshops in the name of development."

Khalifa told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that his workshop, in an alley off Mohamed Ali Street, close to Dar El-Kutub, was under threat of closure.

The number of homes and workshops that will actually be demolished is still a matter of speculation. Residents and tradesmen recently held a day of mourning, with black sheets displayed from their balconies to protest the feared demolition of their homes for what they insist is unnecessary development. They have also spoken to their representatives at the People's Assembly, sent a total of 4,000 telegrams to the president, and sent a substantial amount of money on an advertisement to put a plea letter in *Al-Ahram* newspaper.

So what is the truth behind the rumours that as many as 20,000 workshops and 10,000 families risk losing their property?

"I've said it before and I'll say it again: no houses will be demolished now," Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher told the *Weekly*. "We are making some plans for the whole district, but for the moment, no buildings will be destroyed." Asked whether existing buildings would be preserved in the future, Abdel-Akher replied: "I hope so."

This is not the first official reassurance Bab El-Khalq residents have received. Minister of Culture Farouq Hosni has stated that "the development project will only be implemented after extensive research... Work will not start until all possible research has been completed in order to protect the interests of the people." He affirmed that "the construction work will not harm anyone. Any demolition will be on a very restricted basis, and we will only demolish haphazardly built houses [buildings erected without planning permission] which are impossible to upgrade." Residents, he added, would receive appropriate compensation.

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## Confrontation continues

THERE were more confrontations between Islamist militants and the police this week in the southern city of Sohag.

In the hilly area linking Assiut with Sohag, State Security officers attacked a militant hideout and killed Gassal Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Nasser, described by Ministry of Interior sources as a "leading militant", together with his right-hand man, Abdel-Hamid, the sources said, was responsible for the recruitment and training of new cadres of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya.

The law enforcement agents also arrested seven militants and confiscated their arms, and police sources said that plans for attacks on the motorcades of senior state officials were also seized.

## Balancing bad against worse

Underlying the rising anger at Shimon Peres' policies, expressed by the Egyptian press and public opinion in the weeks preceding the Israeli elections, was the virtual certainty that he would win. Against a backdrop of rising tension in Egyptian-Israeli relations, Egyptians were outraged by the brutality of the Israeli onslaught on south Lebanon last April, made especially flagrant by the Qana massacre in which more than 100 civilians, including many women and children, were killed by Israeli bombing.

By the time he was running for election, Peres had few friends in Egypt. Commentators and analysts in the national as well as the opposition press were fiercely attacking Israeli policy, and along with it, what they described as a "blind American bias" towards Israel. On the eve of the Israeli elections there was a virtual consensus in the Egyptian press that the peace process was being subverted into an Israeli peace, imposed on the Arabs by brute force.

In spite of this, and possibly because of it, the victory of Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu in the premiership election in Israel, was a great shock to Egyptians, as it was for the rest of the Arabs. "If this was the kind of peace we were

offered under the dovish Peres, what are we to expect under a hawkish Netanyahu," seemed to be the general response to the reports of the Likud leader's victory. Underlying the sense of shock and despondency was also the feeling among many that Peres' headline policies were, at least in part, motivated by a desire to out-bid Netanyahu, and that he would "mellow", once the elections were over.

Analysts and commentators from across the Egyptian political spectrum, interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, seemed to be of two minds over their reaction. Suggesting that a Netanyahu-led government in Israel, by rejecting the land-for-peace principle upon which the process is based, would totally derail it, many nevertheless were fast to argue that Netanyahu and Peres are "two sides of the same coin". But whatever their assessments of Netanyahu versus Peres, there was a consensus among analysts and commentators

that the time has come for a new and unified Arab peace strategy.

It was Netanyahu's extremism that won him the election, argued political analyst Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. "Therefore he has to keep on acting the extremist right-wing leader." What makes the prospects of Arab-Israeli peace even gloomier, he continued, is the fact that the new Israeli leader believes that the more extremist his posture, the better his position will be at the negotiating table with the Arab parties.

But for Ragab El-Banna, editor-in-chief of the national weekly magazine *October*, the results of the Israeli elections signify very little. "What can Netanyahu do that Peres has not done already," he asked. Both leaders, and their parties, seek Israel's domination over the Arabs, he said, arguing that the Arabs should concentrate on consolidating their ranks and power in order to oblige Israel's leaders, whoever they may be, to

accept a just peace in the Middle East. "But if the Arabs do not change, why would Israel change, or why would the US?"

The leader of the Democratic Nasserist Party, Dieckman Dawoud was similarly unconcerned with Netanyahu's victory. "As a party, we do not really care who is prime minister in Israel. Any peace that comes from the Israelis is no peace at all, it is our [Arab] surrender."

The call issued on Saturday by Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia for an expanded Arab summit conference instilled a note of optimism in the atmosphere of despondency. The opposition parties hailed the summit, which is to be convened on 21 June, as a proper response to Israeli intransigence. Ibrahim Shukri, the leader of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, was quoted by the party's mouthpiece *Al-Shaab* as welcoming the conference, though expressing "reservations" over Iraq's exclusion.

"The Arab summit has become an aim in itself. Merely to meet is a reminder that we are a single force and a single nation. This is the bare minimum. The popular demand is that this summit should reach firm and practical decisions, which can be pursued on the ground," said Shukri.

## Underwater survey continues

Breakwaters will no longer hinder the excavation of submerged ruins off the site of the ancient Lighthouse of Alexandria. Hala Hallim reports

In the wake of wide coverage in the media, a French-Egyptian team of archaeologists have resumed work on the submerged ruins off Qait Bey Fort in Alexandria. Strewn with more than 2,000 archaeological elements, the importance of the site derives from its location off Pharos Island, where the Lighthouse of Alexandria once stood.

The team, headed by Jean-Yves Empereur of the Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines (CEA), is continuing to photograph, sketch, map and film the pieces of statues and masonry. This, the fourth season of the excavation, also holds the promise that several issues concerning the future of the site will be resolved. Already, the problem posed by a breakwater of some 180 concrete blocks lying over the antiquities has been solved with the announcement by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) that the blocks are to be moved (see *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 16-22 May).

"The concrete blocks are not going to be completely raised from the site, but deposited elsewhere underwater, according to the recommendations of a workshop to be held in the coming weeks to decide on a strategy to protect the fort while allowing the archaeologists to complete their work," explained SCA Secretary-General Abdel-Halim Nour-Eddin.

The decision comes as a salutary sign of a more global approach to conservation within the SCA. For it was the SCA's Engineering Department that had commissioned the dumping of the concrete blocks for the protection of the 15th century Mameluke Qait Bey Fort a few years ago, despite the fact that the submerged site had

long been known to the authorities. It took a campaign, spearheaded by filmmaker Asmaa El-Bakri, to persuade the SCA to put the construction of the breakwater on hold while giving the archaeologists the go-ahead to excavate.

The removal of the wall of concrete blocks will allow the team to fill in the blanks in their topographical study of the site, tracing patterns in the alignment of archaeological elements observed in other parts. A case in point is the number of huge Aswan granite blocks lying underwater. With the computer analysis of the maps made of the site, it was noted that these granite blocks were oriented in a line beginning immediately off the shore and pointing to the northeast. This, together with their massive size (ranging from 50 to 75 tonnes) indicated, Empereur argued, that they could only have fallen from a high structure — such as the lighthouse. Given that a number of these granite blocks lie under the breakwater, its dismantling will enable the team to complete their survey and study of the blocks.

Furthermore, segments of statues previously raised from the site which lie under the breakwater can now be recovered. Indeed, the huge head of a Ptolemy, raised for the benefit of French President Jacques Chirac on his visit to Egypt last spring, had been trapped under the blocks. The head is almost certainly the one matching the torso of a colossal male statue raised last season, confirms Jean-Pierre Cortegiani of the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO). It is also hoped, adds Empereur, that the team will be able to locate the missing feet of the colossal female statue raised in the early '60s by diver Kamal Abul-Saadat and the Egyptian archaeologists

entirely lying on the lawn of the Maritime Museum in Stanley Bay, the statue was at first thought to represent Isis Pharia, the patroness of mariners, whose shrine stood not far from the lighthouse. More, re the Ptolemaic queens in the guise of the goddess. The male and female colossi, he suggests, may have stood side by side, representing one of the royal couples.

Another issue to be resolved in the coming weeks is the future of the site and the interrelated question of what is to be done with the submerged archaeological elements. While approximately 34 pieces were raised from the site last autumn, hauling out the objects is exorbitantly expensive, and difficult to prioritise, in view of their abundance. On the other hand, the suggestion has been made — by both Empereur and Hassan El-Banna, a professor of oceanography from Alexandria University — that the vast majority of pieces remain *in situ*, and the site be turned into an underwater archaeological park. This would guarantee that the objects retain the narrative of their original context which would be lost if they were displayed elsewhere. However, reservations have been voiced about such a project, including the site's high rate of sewage pollution which would take a number of years to clear up, as well as the question of how the site is to be protected, while safeguarding the fort.

These and other issues are to be settled by the multi-disciplinary ad hoc committee in the coming weeks, headed by Nour-Eddin. The committee is to comprise archaeologists, oceanographers, tourism officials, engineers and experts in coastal protection and shipwreck



## Press Day, freedom day

MORE than 300 journalists gathered at the headquarters of the Press Syndicate on 10 June to celebrate the anniversary of the Extraordinary General Assembly held on that day last year after the passing of the controversial Law 93. Mona El-Nahas attended.

The low-key celebration began at 11am and lasted for just an hour. Roses and memorial medals were offered to the assembled journalists, and press photographs and political cartoons depicting the year-long struggle for the repeal of Law 93 were displayed. Instead of honouring leading journalists, the Syndicate Council decided that the General Assembly itself deserved to be honoured for its leading role during this crucial year.

Speakers from the Syndicate's Council hailed the courageous position of syndicate chairman Ibrahim Nafie during the debate of the draft press law at the Shura Council. Nafie had spoken, they said, for the great majority of

journalists.

Nafie, meanwhile, praised the efforts of the General Assembly during its seven extraordinary sessions. While defending the rights of journalists, the General Assembly had resorted to dialogue, the only civilized means of communication, in an attempt to negotiate with state institutions, Nafie said. He added that the assembly's press code of ethics was a careful balance of journalists' rights and duties.

In Nafie's view, the unified stance adopted by journalists in June 1995 was evidence that "we are capable of defending the freedom of the press, which has been subjected to one of the most difficult crises in its history".

Former Press Syndicate chairman Kamel Zohairi also spoke on behalf of the General Assembly, praising its "courageous attitude while defending press freedom and its unstinting efforts to repeal Law 93."



Nafie, chairman of the Press Syndicate, is presented with a rose

## Debate by scenario?

Discussions in the People's Assembly and Shura Council on a new press law have left journalists convinced that their demands will not be met, reports Gamal Essam El-Din

Journalists have decided to escalate their protest against a draft press law, when it became clear that the draft would be ratified by the People's Assembly on Saturday without the amendments they had demanded.

The draft law was prepared by a joint committee of journalists and legal experts, set up on the instructions of President Hosni Mubarak in an effort to defuse the tension which erupted in May last year between journalists and the government following the passing of Law 93, which imposes harsh penalties for publication offences.

The Shura Council has already debated the draft once, and returned it to President Mubarak. The draft was then returned to the council, which approved the completed draft this week. It has also been approved by the People's Assembly's Culture Committee, a prelude to a debate in the full Assembly.

Discussions in both the Shura Council and the Culture Committee have left journalists deeply frustrated and saddened by the ferocity of opposition to their cause, with a majority of both houses insisting that the draft law should be approved without any of the amendments suggested by journalists.

The journalists' demands for amendments had been ignored by the committee which originally drew up the draft. First and foremost among these is the repeal of Law 93 as a whole. The only remaining article of the old law, Article Two, allows for the imprisonment of journalists for publication

offences. Journalists believe that these offences should be punishable by fines only.

However, the council refused to consider these demands, despite the arguments of journalist deputies that long-term imprisonment for publication offences was a draconian measure out of line with practice in other countries, and that without freedom of the press there could be no freedom in society as a whole.

"This law is by no means a full solution to our case," commented Ibrahim Nafie, chairman of the Press Syndicate and a Shura Council member. "I had hoped that I would be going to the [Press Syndicate] General Assembly to announce that the provisions of Law 93 had been removed — that terms of imprisonment and fines had been reduced and that the nightmare of Law 93 was finally over. We all were deeply disappointed."

The seemingly unbridgeable gap between journalist deputies and other members of the Shura Council, revealed in the first Shura Council debate, prompted Nafie to request the intervention of President Mubarak to act as the final arbiter.

While the first day of the Shura Council's second debate passed relatively peacefully, there was a severe clash on the second day as the debate moved on to discussion of penalties for publication offences. The most vocal opposition to the journalists came from lawyers, and the clash was aggravated by the fact that local newspaper criticism of Shura Council members' attacks on journalists seemed to have led those members to become even further entrenched in their positions.

Several law professors insisted that the draft was well balanced, granting freedom to "serious" journalists while maintaining the privacy of individuals. These members refused to consider journalists' requests to include an explicit statement in the draft to the effect that Law 93 was repealed.

"The law is progressive in the sense that it guarantees responsible freedom to the press, and it is balanced in terms of that it is highly concerned with coordinating between the responsible freedom of the press and other freedoms in society as a whole," asserted Mahmoud Naguib Hosni, an appointed Shura Council member and professor of criminal law at Cairo University.

Hosni, who is married to Fawzia Abdel-Sattar, former chairwoman of the People's Assembly's Legislative and Constitutional Committee, which played a major role in passing Law 93, emphasised that the new law would take precedence over older laws which contradicted it. There was, therefore, no need for a clear statement of Law 93's repeal, he said.

However, Rifiat El-Said, an appointed member and secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party, confronted Hosni with a published statement by parliamentary speaker, Fathi Sorour, in which he stated that the new law did not repeal Law 93. "So why not let us relax and lay our doubts to rest with an explicit text that repeals Law 93?" asked El-Said.

Sekina Fouad, an appointed council member and a journalist at *Al-Ahram*, emphasised that "the press has always existed for the sake of the people and I don't think that President Mubarak would ever

support a law that aimed to foment discord."

Journalists were confronted with unyielding opposition from the lawyers' camp when it came to attempting to change chapters three, four, and five of the draft, titled respectively "Journalists' duties", "Disciplining journalists", and "Criminal responsibility in press offences".

The lawyers' camp was supported by Mohamed Ragab, leader of the parliamentary majority of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) in the Council, who adamantly refused any changes, calling upon members to approve the articles as they had been drafted by the committee.

On Article 21, for example, which bans journalists from publishing details about the private life of citizens, both Nafie and Sekina called for an amendment allowing "journalists to deal with the private lives of citizens as long as it is not with the intention of harming their lives." Hosni responded by arguing that this article must remain because it protected the sanctity of private life.

However, the severest confrontation was over Article 43. This article limits the police's right to search journalists' workplaces, making it subject to an order of the Prosecutor General. Journalist members Nafie and Sekina wanted to extend this limit to searching the homes of journalists, but their proposal was vehemently opposed.

According to Hosni, such a change would be unconstitutional, "because it is

discriminatory and gives journalists a privilege at the expense of other professions".

This triggered a storm of protest from the journalists' camp. "This is the strangest explanation I have ever heard. Do we stop being journalists when we go to home?" argued Anis Mansour, an appointed member and a veteran journalist. "I have published more than 140 books, and all of them were written at home... If we take this article as it is, it means that I have never been a journalist. We don't deserve this kind of injustice."

Sekina argued that the council's refusal to approve the change "confirms that most of the lawyers here do not understand the true meaning of journalism".

Frustrated by the council's refusal to amend this article, Nafie accused council members of acting in accordance with a "well-arranged scenario".

"Please do not let us think that you are merely approving what has been decided in advance," added Tagammu's El-Said.

Meanwhile, the People's Assembly's Culture Committee also approved the draft press law with no amendments, after experiencing a similar confrontation between journalists and other committee members, most of them lawyers. The committee rejected most of the amendments proposed by Ayman Nour, a Wafdist journalist, while Mohamed Gewell, a lawyer and Mohamed Mousa, a lawyer who heads the Assembly's Constitutional and Legislative committee, rejected any amendments, emphasising that the law was balanced, integrated and progressive.



Mustafa Kamal Helmi



Ibrahim Nafie



Sekina Fouad



Rifiat El-Said

## Press Syndicate Council resigns in anger

The 12-member Press Syndicate Council announced its resignation on 10 June, as the Press Syndicate was celebrating Press Day, marking the first anniversary of their historic General Assembly when hundreds of journalists gathered to protest Law 93, the press law which had been pushed through parliament just weeks before.

Council members said their resignation was a protest against the failure of the legislative institutions to incorporate any of the amendments proposed by journalists into the draft of a new press law. First among these demands is the repeal of Law 93.

The draft law, without the journalists' amendments, was approved by the Shura Council this week and is expected to get the final approval of the People's Assembly on Saturday.

Most journalists approved of the syndicate council's decision, viewing it as the least that could be done in the circumstances. Although the resignation was announced on Monday and presented to the Press Syndicate's General Assembly yesterday, it will be discussed during the General Assembly to be held following the debate of the draft press law at the People's Assembly, members of the council said.

Ibrahim Nafie, who announced his own resignation as syndicate chairman before yesterday's General Assembly, called upon council members to continue performing their duties until that date.

Amid growing dismay over failure to reach a compromise with the government over a draft press law, the Press Syndicate Council announced a collective resignation, reports Mona El-Nahas

Members of the syndicate council said they had taken such a step out of respect to journalists, who had put their trust in the council. The council had promised journalists that a balanced press law would be reached by means of dialogue. Having failed to achieve this, council members felt that resignation was "the only honourable course".

The syndicate council's deputy chairman, Galal Eissa, speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* before yesterday's General Assembly, said: "I am sure our stance will be appreciated by the majority of journalists. With the government's hostile attitude, we found no other option but to declare our total opposition to this draft, which undermines press freedom. History will record that the current council abided by its word and did not betray the trust of journalists." Eissa hoped that their step would have a tangible effect on the People's Assembly debate of the draft.

Council member Raga' El-Merghani said that the resignation was a true reflection of the resentment felt by most journalists at the policy of procrastination adopted by the government in its tackling of the issue of the press law, particularly the fact that, "After a one-year struggle, the government has refused to explicitly repeal the controversial Law 93." He

hoped that the resignations would embarrass government officials and lead them to abandon their hostile policy against journalists.

Others were not so optimistic. Another member of the council, Yehya Qallash, did not foresee any effective government reaction. "In the absence of true democratic principles, something like this could hardly lead to anything new," Qallash commented.

Sources close to the council members said that the decision to resign had not been made on the spur of the moment. Some council members had seriously considered resignation a week ago; they later gained the support of the remaining members, who agreed that efforts to reach a compromise with the government had failed.

In a statement issued immediately following the submission of the council's collective resignation, members expressed their appreciation of the honorable stance taken by syndicate chairman Nafie during the debate of the draft at the Shura Council.

Prominent journalists viewed the council's resignation as a necessary means of pressure, taken only when all other avenues had ended in deadlock. Because dialogue had failed, journalists should adopt

other strategies, they advised.

Gamal Badawi, editor-in-chief of the opposition newspaper *Al-Wafd*, said that this serious step showed the degree of frustration felt by journalists. "After going through all the proper and legal channels, we have to admit that it was nothing but a waste of time," he said. "So, if we were now to lose our temper, and act in a rather irrational way, we shouldn't be blamed. The government has cornered the journalists and forced them to resort to methods like these."

*Al-Ahram's* renowned columnist and former member of the syndicate council Salama Ahmed Salama said that the resignations indicated that journalists had despaired of achieving a new law that would meet their demands and take Egypt into the 21st century. In the light of the current political atmosphere, Salama said, it would be extremely difficult to expect any positive reaction to the journalists' action. "On the contrary, it may lead to a much more stubborn policy on the part of the government," he predicted.

Journalist Sekina Fouad, who is also a member of the Shura Council, does not believe that the resignations will provide any leverage against the government. "All it does is express the state of despair pervading the council, especially after the at-

titude adopted by the Shura Council members, who are supposedly responsible for protecting the press," she said.

However, leftist writer Salah Eissa welcomed the council's decision. "We're in favour of all forms of protest, because we do not have any other means left. I think this is the first in a series of measures which should be taken, including sit-ins and strikes."

Hussein Abdel-Razeq, editor-in-chief of *Al-Yasir* (Left) magazine predicted that the forthcoming battle between journalists and the government would be very fierce, because journalists will never accept a law that muzzles the press and undermines their rights.

And, in a protest action bound to escalate an already heated situation, dozens of journalists started an open-ended sit-in at the headquarters of their syndicate on Monday. The syndicate's council members joined the sit-in following yesterday's General Assembly. Nafie said that journalists had every right to take such an action, which was a reasonable response to their current situation, as long as they did not violate the law.

Meanwhile, national newspaper editors-in-chief issued a joint statement on Monday calling on the People's Assembly to take journalists' demands into consideration while discussing the draft law. Leaders of opposition parties and the Legal Aid Centre for Human Rights have also issued statements declaring their support for efforts to repeal Law 93.

## Al-Azhar bans The Truth of the Veil

A former judge says that an order by Al-Azhar to confiscate his book on the veil is tantamount to an incitement for militants to assassinate him. Omayma Abdel-Latif investigates

A new crisis has broken out between Al-Azhar and supporters of freedom of expression following an Al-Azhar decree that a book by former judge Said El-Ashmawi, dealing with the question of the whether the veil is obligatory for Muslim women, should be banned.

Omar El-Bastawisi, director of the office of Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, confirmed that Al-Azhar's Translation and Publishing Department had reviewed the book, *The Truth of the Veil*, and decided it should be banned because it "contains flagrant religious mistakes". Bastawisi said that the Translation and Publishing Department was responsible for examining all books dealing with Islamic issues and deciding whether they should remain on sale.

The dispute between Ashmawi and Al-Azhar took another turn last week when police in Alexandria raided a bookshop and confiscated copies of the book. Legal sources said the police had acted on their own initiative, without a court order. For a book to be confiscated, a case must be filed against its author, which has to be approved by the court. The court then authorises the book to be taken out of circulation. In Ashmawi's case, the source said, nothing had been filed against him or his book. Ashmawi said he would contest the Al-Azhar de-

creed, but he did not reveal how he would go about it. "I will decide how and when I will respond to all this rhetoric," he said.

Published in June 1995, *The Truth of the Veil* is a collection of articles which appeared in the weekly *Rose El-Youssef* magazine. The book also contains the response made by Tantawi, who was the Mufti of Egypt at the time, in which he refuted Ashmawi's arguments on the veil.

The fact that the material had already been published has caused Ashmawi to question why Al-Azhar developed an interest in it only after it appeared in book form.

In the book, Ashmawi argues that there is no religious text or *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohamed) which clearly states that the veil is compulsory for all Muslim women. The Qur'anic text in relation to this matter, Ashmawi claims, only refers to the wives of the prophet, who are instructed to veil because of their status, and not to all Muslim women.

He argues that the veil has become a political, rather than a religious issue. "Imposing the veil on Muslim women nowadays is a political statement, to distinguish those women who belong to Islamic groups from those who do not," Ashmawi wrote. According to the book's publisher, Mohamed

Madbouli, no copies have been confiscated in Cairo. He added that 10,000 copies had been sold so far.

Ashmawi believes that Al-Azhar's action has made him a target for militant attack. "By confiscating my books, they [Al-Azhar] are inciting young men to assassinate me," Ashmawi said. "The department that ordered the confiscation of my book has no legal foundation."

But Sheikh Ali El-Kholi, a member of the *Fatwa* (edict) Committee of Al-Azhar, denied that the Muslim world's oldest institution of learning was seeking to incite violence against Ashmawi.

"We are against the killing of any human being, and we believe that members of militant groups are murderers and criminals, who give people like Ashmawi an excuse to criticise Islam," he added that Al-Azhar's duty was to state the truth and to guide the people along the right path. "But it is not our job to incite the killing of innocent people."

El-Kholi described Ashmawi's writings as "an organised campaign against Islam", rather than an attempt to provide a better understanding of the religion.

This is not the first confrontation between Al-

Azhar and Ashmawi. During Cairo's 1992 International Book Fair, a number of Al-Azhar scholars attempted to implement a banning order by Al-Azhar's *Fatwa* Committee against five of Ashmawi's books, asking stallholders at the book fair to remove the books from their shelves. Their move caused widespread protests by intellectuals, and President Hosni Mubarak intervened personally to reverse Al-Azhar's order.

In June 1995, the State Council's Administrative Court ruled that Al-Azhar had no authority to ban the publication or distribution of books and other works of art, without recourse to the courts.

And Mahmoud Kandil, a lawyer at the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, confirmed the view that Al-Azhar decrees represented a religious opinion rather than a direct order.

"There is no court order to confiscate the book and you cannot ban it just because a *fatwa* was issued," Kandil said.

Lawyer Ahmed Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna, a leading member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, said

he was opposed to banning books, even if they contained anti-Islamic views. El-Banna, who is also a member of the Committee for Defending Freedom of Expression, Thought and Belief said: "We should reach the stage when if we find a book which is counter to our beliefs, we boycott it instead of banning it. The banning of works of art should be stopped," El-Banna said. He emphasised, however, that Islamists must also have the right to respond to views which run counter to their beliefs.

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Edited by Wadie Kirolos



# Rebuilding Arab solidarity

**Nabil Fahmy, political advisor to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, in an exclusive interview with Inas Nour, explained the reasons behind the convening of the forthcoming Arab summit meeting scheduled for 21 June. With the rapidly changing international climate, the coming to power of Likud leader, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel and the approach of the final status negotiations, vital Arab interests are at stake. But, argues Fahmy, an all-Arab meeting does not mean an all-out assault on Israel and need not arouse Israeli fears. An all-Arab summit meeting is essentially about inter-Arab dialogue**



The Arab summit meeting which will be hosted by Egypt on 21 June is the first such meeting in six years. What are the implications of staging a summit at this particular time? Why has Arab public opinion been mobilised now? Can we say once again that it is Israel that drives the Arabs to combine forces?

I think that's a very pertinent question. [It is] a question which has to be responded to quite carefully, because the perception is that a summit is a reflection of reality. First of all, Arab countries and Egypt in particular have been working towards developing a wider Arab consensus on inter-Arab affairs, and closer and more effective Arab channels of communication, for a number of years. One example was the Alexandria tripartite summit in December 1994 between Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Another opportunity was the 50th anniversary of the Arab League and the speech given by President Mubarak on that occasion, where he emphasised clearly the need for Arab-Arab cooperation. The point being made then and the point being made now was not if this cooperation is directed against anybody in particular or against Israel specifically, but rather that cooperation is an imperative for Arab interests. It also implies that cooperating and developing better means of consultation is imperative to resolve Arab-Arab disputes and problems and to enable the Arabs to consult with each other as they assess new regional situations or new international developments. Moreover, there are numerous international developments which warrant an Arab position, although an Arab summit *per se* has been our objective for some time. But, it is important to reiterate that the summit is not directed at Israel.

On the other hand it is quite normal to expect this Arab summit to discuss, among other things, the peace process in the Middle East, which has been passing through a rather difficult phase over the last few months, after some significant successes on the Palestinian and Jordanian tracks. There have been many developments and it is quite normal, quite logical, and I believe beneficial for the Arab countries, to consider and assess the peace process and discuss how they can advance it.

Why now? Why wasn't it possible before? The two main issues to be dealt with at the conference will be the peace process and how to develop our Arab-Arab consultations. On one hand the peace process has been passing through a difficult phase. On the other hand there is a need for more effective Arab-Arab consultations. This need has become extremely evident over the last few years — especially so over the last few months. So I think that both issues peaked at the same time. And therefore you find a coincidence of interests between those interested in the peace process and those interested in Arab-Arab cooperation. Both factors came together and that's why it's possible now. But the Arab summit has not been called to discuss with the peace process alone, nor to deal with Arab-Arab interests alone. I would argue that it is a very constructive and very positive step, rather than something which need alarm people.

The Sharm El-Sheikh summit was attended by Arab and world leaders. But it was described as a meeting that was essentially for Israel's benefit. For months, President Hosni Mubarak had been asked if he would organise an all-Arab summit meeting. Mubarak had replied that it

would take some time to organise. Suddenly we have an Arab summit at last. Why?

Again my answer is that the perception is different from reality. On the one hand I don't agree with you. I don't believe that the Sharm El-Sheikh meeting was convened only for Israel. It was convened for the peace process. If that helps Israel, why not? Israel is part of the peace process. And as long as it is part of the peace process there's nothing wrong with helping Israel. Egypt has concluded a peace treaty with Israel. We are trying to establish a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab countries. The Sharm El-Sheikh meeting was meant to help the peace process. It was meant to help both sides — the Arabs and Israel.

There are two factors that led to the convening of the forthcoming summit. First, the peace process has been going through a difficult phase. Second, we're moving towards final settlement issues, which need to be assessed clearly and which involve many different Arab parties, whereas in previous summit meetings the focus was more on the process of negotiating and building confidence in order to deal with final settlement issues. Now we are moving towards those final issues and there is a need for Arab-Arab consultation.

You'll recall that even before the Israeli elections, Egypt convened a tripartite meeting between the Palestinians and Jordanians with Egypt as a host. Why did we do that? Because it was important to deal with common issues between the Palestinians and the Jordanians related to final settlement issues. So, as Israel is an integral part of the peace process it is consequently a party to any activity that deals with the peace process. The final negotiations involve more than the [immediate] negotiating parties but many other countries. If you look at the refugee problem in particular there are the Palestinian refugees who reside in four or five Arab countries, if not more. The host countries are all part of that issue. If you look at the Jerusalem issue the same applies [for religious reasons]. You have the same situation if you look at the security issue in general. It involves not only the two or three parties directly involved but many other countries. So both the nature of the peace process and the phase it has now reached makes it imperative to have wider consultations. Secondly, we felt that the peace process was getting into a very difficult and tense phase, so it was important for us as Arabs to consult with each other. The way to resolve differences and compare notes is to have wider consultations between the Arab countries. But this is only one track or one item on the agenda of the Arab summit. The other is the need for better Arab-Arab cooperation and coordination on issues which do not necessarily relate to Israel directly.

So I would argue that, yes, there is a relationship between the convening of the forthcoming summit and the peace process, and therefore Israel as a party to the peace process. The summit is being held now because of elements related to the peace process and therefore elements in which Israel has a role to play. These are issues of vital interest to Israel. Another element concerning the summit relates to Arab-Arab discussions *per se* and has nothing to do with Israel.

What scenario do you envisage for the forthcoming summit meeting and its aftermath? Is it a brainstorming session or is there going to be a continuity of collaboration on a regular basis? President Mubarak has been calling for the convening of Arab summits on a regular basis since

bar to the Organisation of African Unity's annual summit meetings. If there are differences between the Arabs, then these differences must be ironed out, otherwise the problems will continue. Has this point been raised in the communications between Egypt and the other Arab states?

That's also an important question because I think we should not overstate expectations. But it is also important not to belittle the value or the importance of the summit. You yourself asked the question: why the summit and why now?

The convening of the summit is some achievement in itself, because holding the summit irrespective of its possible results reflects the fact that there are common interests in the Arab world. We shall try to discuss issues of common concern. Whether they are the peace process or whether they are inter-Arab issues we need to talk — and that's a very important strategy. We have not had a wider Arab summit for a long time. So the call for a summit is in itself an achievement and the convening of the summit will also be an achievement. But we will not be satisfied simply with that, even though I believe that they are two major achievements. We are realistic in thinking we cannot expect to discuss and resolve all issues related to the peace process or related to Arab-Arab concerns within a two-day period. Furthermore there will always be new issues that will emerge on the peace process on the Arab front, and therefore what we would like to see is the conference concluding by laying down the foundations for an "Arab manifesto" on how to develop better strategies.

What is the Arab position concerning the peace process? How do we reaffirm the Arab position? Then how will Arabs consult [with each other]? And how will they enhance the mechanism that exists within the Arab League for Arab-Arab consultation and conflict resolution mechanisms. You quoted the president as saying that we were looking for a process rather than for immediate or concrete results. Our objectives are more substantial than that. I think what we would like to do is to develop a foundation and a real process for continuing dialogue, by holding meetings at appropriate level: in other words holding technical meetings, ministerial meetings or summit meetings. Personally, I don't believe it is necessary to hold a series of [haphazard] summits or ministerial meetings. But, there has to be a process of regular consultation. We have to meet as often as is necessary and at the appropriate level and to prepare our work thoroughly and then raise it to the political level before a decision is taken.

I don't want to say that summits which took place in the past were neither rational or useful. All I'm saying is that there are significant new challenges. On the international level too, there will hopefully be a new regional situation with [lasting] peace in the Middle East. These challenges warrant a more effective process of consultation between the Arab countries to develop their own interests. I would like to describe the summit as a reaffirmation of Arabs' interest in working together.

Arab summits had been so infrequent in the past. Maybe the assumption is that Arabs meet only when there's a major crisis. And it is an assumption for which we should remedy with more frequent consultations. I don't see Arab-Arab meetings as being anti-Israeli. That simply doesn't make sense. The Arab countries are committed to the peace process on the basis agreed to in Madrid with Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425. So I don't see any contradiction or conflict between Arab-Arab meetings and [our attitude towards] Israel. It is wrong for anybody to draw the conclusion that Arab meetings are directed against Israel.

The Arab world has got a lot in common. Not every Arab summit relates exclusively to Israel or the Western world, or any other part of the world for that matter. I think consultations are a constructive process and I would argue that one should wait and see what the results are before drawing rash conclusions. Both Arabs and Israelis gain from helping the peace process. I think that Arab-Arab meetings help preserve Arab interests. We're in one boat together on the peace process and we have to work together and accept each other.

If we now have a good chance of resolving the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait and other Gulf Arab countries, why was Iraq not invited?

Again it's important to make two points here: First, Egypt is looking forward to the time when all Arab countries can sit together and consult on issues of common interest and concern. We want to involve all the Arab countries — including Iraq. That is why the president said on his return from Damascus that in principle everybody is invited but that we would postpone the Iraqi invitation for the time being. We're looking towards the complete participation of all Arab countries at an appropriate phase [in the future]. The second point — and this again is consistent in our policy and has been frequently restated — is that we're trying to build a wider Arab consensus. We agree, and we've admitted that over the last two years the Arab world had reached a point where it became very difficult to convene all-Arab summits. But we gradually built our contacts and are networking to try to develop a wider Arab consensus. This last week alone we saw Egypt being party to bilateral and trilateral summits and ministerial meetings. This is a clear indication that we are working very carefully to develop an Arab consensus. But at this point it was not possible to involve Iraq as a participant in the summit.

And what about the invitation to Sudan to attend the Arab summit meeting?

Our position is that the participation or the lack of participation of a particular Arab country doesn't mean that issues related to that country have changed. This summit will not solve all the Arab problems. It's unrealistic to expect that. If that was the case then frankly the problems would not be that serious. The participants are coming because they are Arab countries. The presence of one country doesn't mean that the problems concerning that country have been resolved. And vice versa, the absence of one country does not mean that it will be permanently absent from Arab summit meetings.

Turkey and Israel have signed a military cooperation pact and a string of economic agreements. The issue is of grave concern to many Arab countries. Similarly, the Iranians are said to be involved in the civil disturbances in Bahrain. Iran has urged Arab states to review and even scrap their peace treaties with Israel. It has also called for an Islamic summit meeting on the

issue. Do you think that there should be a way of establishing closer ties and more harmonious relations between Arab countries and Turkey and Iran? Can regional cooperation be used constructively to further Arab interests? First of all, the Arab world must cooperate more closely with its neighbours — including, of course, Iran and Turkey. That is our objective. We must have wider Arab-Arab cooperation. We must deal with the challenges and opportunities of the international community. Of course, that means primarily with our neighbours. We'd like to see the situation where relations with both Turkey and Iran are enhanced, but let's try to take things step by step. We haven't even been able to get to a situation where we have all the Arab countries participating. We are determined to solve our problems. If we do that, then I think we would have achieved a major step forward. We must also tackle regional issues and problems. I would like to see us reach the point where relations between Iran and individual Arab countries and the Arab world in general, become stronger.

How would you describe relations between Egypt and Iran?

I think [they are fairly] normal relations. I don't believe that there's any need for a go-between between Egypt and Iran. Egyptian and Iranian officials meet in international conferences and there's no need to have a go-between to ease tensions. We're not adversaries either — at least not directly. Without a doubt the relations could be better and hopefully that will be realised in time.

What is expected of the summit meeting, particularly regarding its recommendations? Is the final communiqué going to be regarded as a working paper, a declaration, or practical recommendations?

We haven't yet concluded anything. We're engaged in intensive discussions and we're trying to develop a format for the discussions as well as the structure for the results that will emerge from them. Let me say this however: I'm more interested in seeing a process being established at this meeting than actually seeing a declaration with a reaffirmation of principles. Having said that they're not mutually exclusive. We'll structure the meeting to allow for an open, candid, business-like exchange, which will allow constructive discussion. We therefore are trying to make the conference useful and to show how we have advanced the Arab-Arab dialogue. As I've said, holding the conference is an achievement in itself, but I want to go beyond that. I want it to be a useful conference in its content as well as its symbolism.

If we can establish a process where we have continuous discussion, then that will be the second important achievement. If and when we decide to put together a concluding document of the conference, then that will be the third level of achievement. I think it is important to allow discussions to occur first and then to decide on how best to reflect them.

What is the message that the summit meeting will convey?

I would argue it's a very positive and constructive message: that the Arab world is determined to continue to be a player on the international scene — whether in terms of political issues or economic or social issues. We are passing through a difficult phase in our history and there may still be difficult phases ahead of us, but I think that we're determined once again to work together. The Arab world cannot agree among itself on every single detail. To expect that is illogical and unrealistic. Look at the European Union and the discussions that occurred between European powers. They reached a level of coordination which is quite impressive, but nevertheless they still disagree on many issues. The EU member states have different priorities and interests. They do not agree on every single detail.

I'd like to change the perception that the Arab world has to agree on every detail of every issue or it is seen as divided. The point to be made is that we have, as Arabs, common interests. Let us advance

those interests together. The second point of the message, I think, concerns the peace process. There's no doubt in my mind that the Arab world supports the peace process. A new basis for peace with Israel has been established by the international community. If we start changing the basis of the peace process, then we will open a Pandora's box. The message that will come out of the conference is: we Arabs want peace. The forthcoming meeting is not directed against Israel. But we're determined to have peace in the region.

**'Arab summits had been so infrequent in the past. Maybe the assumption is that Arabs meet only when there's a major crisis. And it is an assumption for which we are partially to blame, and one which we should remedy with more frequent consultations. I don't see Arab-Arab meetings as being anti-Israeli. The Arab countries are committed to the peace process'**



# Hammas shows restraint

**Hammas spokesman, Mahmoud Zahar, talking to Graham Usher in Gaza, explains why Hamas is maintaining a ceasefire and working towards reconciliation with the PNA**



Mahmoud Zahar, spokesperson for Hamas in the Gaza Strip was deported to south Lebanon for one year by Israel in 1992-93. Zahar has also been imprisoned twice by the PNA in Gaza, for 105 days in 1995 and for two months after the suicide attacks in Israel in late February and early March.

In an interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, Zahar speaks about the possible impact of the Israeli elections on Hamas-PNA relations and about Hamas's future strategies vis-à-vis the new Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu.

In the last period, relations between Hamas and the PNA have been very bad, with the PNA security forces arresting hundreds of Hamas supporters. Some people say Arafat got tangled with Hamas at Israel's bidding so as to help Peres get re-elected. Since Peres and Labour lost the elections, do you think the prospects for a PNA-Hamas reconciliation are better or worse?

We hope they will be better. Our advice is that the PNA should depend on neither Peres nor Netanyahu. It should depend on the Palestinian people, for this will bring unity between us.

But relations could get worse. There are elements in the PNA's security forces who are urging greater repression of Hamas. They argue that any military operation now will consolidate Netanyahu's position and undermine any international pressure on him. This debate inside the PNA between the advocates of reconciliation and the advocates of more repression is not yet settled. Of course, Hamas encourages the reconciliation trend.

When you refer to the PNA's security forces, with whom does Hamas have the worst relations? Are they these forces made up of PLO figures recently returned from exile? Or those

recruited from inside the Occupied Territories? All of them are on the wrong path, regardless of whether they are from here or refugees. They are one system, implementing one policy, albeit in different ways.

The most dangerous thing about this policy is that it creates the conditions for the fragmentation of the Islamic movement, in which individuals or groups start to act independently, under the banner of revenge. In such circumstances, revenge may be taken against officials of the PNA. This is Hamas's greatest fear, for we have seen the consequences of such fragmentation and violence in Egypt and Algeria.

But, due to PNA repression, the soil is fertile for such ideas. This is why Hamas is trying to build a movement behind a policy of reconciliation. For the moment the PNA is not a party, it is a PNA official. We have never issued a fatwa calling for the death of a PNA official solely because he holds a different opinion to us over how to solve the Palestinian question.

But it is difficult to maintain this attitude so long as the PNA kills our people or tortures our prisoners in its jails. Such actions themselves provide a fatwa, a licence for extremism. We have warned the PNA about this. So Hamas is now striving to establish reconciliation as the main idea governing our relations with the PNA. In Gaza, I think we have succeeded. In the West Bank, I hope we shall succeed. In this way, we can remove this poison of confrontation between Palestinians and unify our ranks against the real enemy — Likud.

Apart from reconciliation with the PNA, what are Hamas's priorities in the next period? How will it view Likud? From the beginning of the occupation, we under-

stood the struggle to be multifaceted. In the early years, the emphasis was on the social side. During the Intifada, the political and military sides came to the fore.

In this period, I think the emphasis should be on economic and social reconstruction. We understand that Hamas's military actions will not deliver Palestine to the land of Islam, nor bring an independent Palestinian state, nor prevent a Palestinian state. But we cannot tolerate a situation where Israel or its collaborators can kill with impunity Palestinians from Hamas or Jihad or Ezzeddin Al-Qassam or the PNA. The suicide attacks that followed Israel's assassination of Yehyeh Ayyash were pure revenge. Not to have responded would have been disastrous for Hamas.

As for Netanyahu, our demands are the same as they were for Rabin and Peres. If Israel wants peace, it should release all Palestinian prisoners. If Israel seeks even a temporary ceasefire, it should remove the cancer of settlements in our areas, allow Palestinians to move freely between the West Bank and Gaza and lift the closure of our borders. In short, no peace, no ceasefire, with pressure.

Is Hamas observing a ceasefire at the moment? Yes. I personally called for a suspension of military actions for the duration of the Israeli elections. We knew Peres would fail in the elections, whether or not there were military actions. So why should Hamas give Peres the pretext that we were somehow the cause of his failure, to allow him to say that we were the ones blocking the Palestinian dream? Till now, there is a temporary ceasefire.

If Israel released prisoners and fulfilled the other conditions, how long would a "temporary" ceasefire be? One or two years, subject to negotiations...

Would Hamas negotiate with Israel...?

No. To negotiate directly with Israel would weaken the PNA, which is not our aim. Negotiations should be through a third party, a neutral channel, but in cooperation with the PNA.

Prior to the recent repression, we would have accepted the PNA as the third party. But how can we regard the PNA as neutral while it holds, 1,000 of our people in its jails? If the PNA releases these prisoners, we shall reconsider. But we do not seek to be an alternative to the PNA vis-à-vis negotiations with Israel.

When you called for a temporary ceasefire to avoid the accusation that Hamas was interfering in the Israeli elections, Hamas's spokesperson in Jordan, Ibrahim Ghoshe, said you were speaking personally, not for Hamas. How deep are the divisions in Hamas? There is no division. There are differences due to our different political situations. Gaza is different to the West Bank; the West Bank and Gaza are different to Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Our leaderships there reflect these differences. There is also a difference between our political leaders and our military cadres.

The political leader must have a wider vision, his assessment must be more accurate. Military actions must always serve political goals — this is true even in wars. Hamas does not undertake military actions for their own sake. Once these actions no longer serve the interests of the Palestinian people, they should cease. So division, no; differences, yes — after all, Hamas is a big movement...

But which leaderships lead...? Hamas was born here, it grew here, and Hamas decides here, in Gaza and the West Bank.

## Hezbollah kills soldiers, Israel kills civilian

THE APRIL understanding agreed between Israel and Lebanon, which did not address the armed conflict between Israeli troops and Hezbollah, has done little to defuse tension in the area. Since the truce was brokered six weeks ago, fighting has continued. But alarm bells have been ringing since Hezbollah killed five Israeli soldiers and wounded eight others on Monday in the villages of Dabshé and Ali Taher, a border enclave occupied by Israel. Five days earlier, a member of Israel's proxy South Lebanon Army militia was killed in Israel's so-called security zone.

In an initial retaliatory move, Israel shelled Shi'a Muslim villages and guerrilla infiltration trails close to the town of Nabatieh near the occupied zone later on Monday. A Lebanese army sergeant was killed and a civilian man, the driver of the van, was wounded in the shellfire, police in Nabatieh reported. The aim of the April truce was to spare civilian lives.

Outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres vowed that Israel would respond "in time and in a manner it sees fit", warning Hezbollah against "heating up the area at the expense of Lebanese civilians", the Associated Press reported.

The latest fighting has prompted Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri to meet with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad on Tuesday in Damascus. Without Syria's intervention in April, Hezbollah would not have agreed to the truce.

This week's violence is the deadliest since Israel's 16-day air and artillery bombardment of Lebanon in April claimed the lives of at least 165 people, mostly Lebanese civilians.

## Attack under Netanyahu

IN A FIRST of its kind attack inside Israel, a Jewish settler couple was killed in a drive-by shooting on Monday. The incident took place in the Israeli village of Geffen, a few kilometers away from the West Bank. The victims were residents of the Jewish settlements of Kiryat Arba which is adjacent to Hebron.

So far, no Palestinian organisation has claimed responsibility, but Israeli police said that they suspected Palestinian militants. The Islamic Resistance Movement of Hamas said that it did not carry out the attack. If the assassins prove to be Palestinians, this would be the first militant operation after the electoral victory of Likud's leader, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israeli authorities responded to the incident by ordering merchants to close their shops, and searched shops in downtown Hebron. The Mayor of Hebron, Moustafa Al-Netseh, protested at the closure of the market area in the city's downtown, saying that there is no proof that the assassins came from Hebron. The attack incited new fears that the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron would be delayed. Netanyahu, who campaigned on a platform of security with peace, has yet to decide whether or not to honour a commitment made to Palestinians by outgoing Prime Minister Shimon Peres to withdraw most of the Israeli troops from the city.

## Algeria's constitution at risk

"The problem with Algeria is that the state is too strong while the people are totally weak. They do not hold any political weight," said Said Saadi, leader of the Berber Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) when asked to comment on President Liamine Zeroual's latest political memorandum. To Saadi, the memorandum is a "joke", a "carbon copy" of the "fifth republic institutions of France". Although poignant, Saadi's words reflect the stance that the majority of Algeria's political parties have taken on the memorandum, which is scheduled for discussion next month at a national conference.

The "Project for Institutional Reform", as Zeroual prefers to call his memorandum, was forwarded to political parties, organisations and institutions last month, and carried the president's "suggestions" for "consolidating a pluralistic democracy and putting the final touches to the election process". It goes, however, far beyond that.

Zeroual proposed major amendments to the 1989 constitution, the political parties law and the election law. The memorandum also suggests the establishment of an appointed Upper Council, besides the existing National Popular Council (NPC). The most important "recommendation", however, is "giving the elected president the authority of issuing laws and special decrees", without the approval of parliament.

Although the memorandum emphasises the necessity of making the Algerian identity an Islamic, Arab and Amazighian (Berber) identity, and thus addresses the demands of the Berber parties, this was not enough to win their support. Ali Rashdi, press spokesman for the Berber Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), told Al-Ahram Weekly over the phone from Algiers that his party "rejected the memorandum, both in form and in content". The suggestion to amend the constitution, said Rashdi, is "in itself unconstitutional". Article 163 of the constitution stipulates that any revision has to pass through the elected national council, "which we have not had since the 1991 crisis," he said.

To Rashdi, Zeroual's suggestion to amend the constitution only aims at "usurping the authority of the NPC" since the existence of an-

Zeroual is going too far, say Algeria's political party leaders. Can they stop him from claiming more power? Amira Howaidy seeks an answer

other council, appointed by the president, "will only have one role to play, that is, following the orders of the president." Consequently, says Rashdi, Zeroual's suggestions are a "total setback for democracy" as well as a reneging on Zeroual's electoral promises and programme "which never mentioned constitutional revisions".

When addressing the new political parties law, the memorandum criticised the "ineffectiveness" of the current 64 existing parties. The memorandum suggests adding a new set of rules for the establishment of a party. This includes a one-year experimental stage prior to establishment, and the prohibition of Islamic, Berber or Arab-based platforms. Zeroual did not specify if this applies to existing or future parties. The suggested method will apply, in theory, to the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) if it decides to form a legal party in preparation for parliamentary elections next year. While some believe that the new restrictions on political parties have been tailored to the FIS case, observers believe it will only trigger another chapter of violence.

Rashdi, on the other hand, believes that the Algerian crisis does not stem from a FIS-state conflict, but rather a "military-civil" conflict. "We are dealing with a hard-line military system that does not accept democratic principles. And the military's history reveals how they, and no one else, used religion for political purposes."

But it seems that even the army is not content with Zeroual's suggestions. In an article published two weeks ago in the Algerian press by the orchestrator of the 1991 events, General Khaled Nizar revealed his objections. Nizar, known as the army's strongman, was defence minister during the '91 events and oversaw the intervention of the

army after the FIS received 80 per cent of the votes in the first round of elections and prevented the second and final round from taking place. He resigned in 1993 and was replaced by Zeroual himself. Nizar, who did not respond directly to Zeroual's memorandum, interpreted the whole issue as one that "only aims at giving more political and legal authority to the president in the form of a safety belt from a possible parliamentary majority that could result from the coming elections."

Although Zeroual has not yet revealed the criteria for appointing the members of the Upper Council, observers expect them to be among the retired fighters of the war of independence and most of the leaders of the former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN). With such a group, the appointed Upper Council is expected to replace and balance the monopolised power of the army, especially if members of the FLN decide to form a coalition with Zeroual in the upcoming elections. Criticising this expected alliance, Nizar rejected "the replacement of an army faced with internal problems by an ambitious party seeking power once more."

The next step is the upcoming national conference. Out of the 200 political figures Zeroual invited to attend the conference, 175 have confirmed that they will attend. The FIS was excluded but sources close to Zeroual say that the dialogue with the FIS has not stopped and that there are expectations that they will play a role in the future reconciliation process.

But Rashdi remains pessimistic. "The FFS will attend the conference, and we will object to what we disagree to, but the government only wants a conference that will support changing the constitution." He added that Algeria's major political parties — he listed the RCD, FLN, Nahda and Hamas — hold the same opinion. "We have agreed to push for rejecting those suggestions," said Rashdi. The National Charter Group, he said, still insists on their statement which calls for a peaceful political solution with the participation of all parties, including the FIS.

## Tide turns in Turkey

Will a Refah-led government see the light this time round, asks Samia Nkrumah

Since Turkey's former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller withdrew from a coalition with the Left-wing Republican People's Party (RPP) in September, the hegemony of secular forces in the west Asian state has been undermined. The current secular-Islamic rivalry has further highlighted political uncertainty in the country.

The resignation of Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Motherland Party (ANAP), as Turkey's latest prime minister on 6 June has fuelled fresh fears lest the country remains in the grip of political instability for several months to come. His fragile Centre-Right coalition government with Ciller's True Path Party (DYP) collapsed only three months after its inception on 6 March of this year.

From the outset the uneasy alliance between the two secular rivals was doomed. Lacking a solid majority in the 550-seat parliament, the ANAP-DYP coalition's only hope of survival was to act as a single-party government. But the last few weeks proved that this hope was a far cry from reality. The personal animosity between Yilmaz and Ciller proved the coalition's direct undoing. It also exposed the weakness of the secular mainstream and the public's growing frustration with what it sees as a pointless Yilmaz-Ciller contest. Many now see that the solution lies in the exit of one of the two leaders, or both, to pave the way for the emergence of a unified conservative Right-wing front.

If Yilmaz succeeded in tarnishing Ciller's political image it is because the shadow of corruption is hanging over Ankara. According to statements made to the press by Abdullah Gheoul, deputy leader of the pro-Islamic Welfare (Refah) Party, allegations of Ciller's corruption were first released in a memorandum by ANAP. Subsequently, Refah succeeded in opening a parliamentary inquiry into corruption charges against Ciller based on ANAP's findings. Around 30 ANAP members of parliament joined Refah in voting in favour of the probe.

Yilmaz obviously wanted Ciller out. If parliament had decided that she be taken to the Supreme Court this autumn, she would have been constitutionally barred from becoming prime minister next year — something to which she was entitled under the now defunct coalition agreement between the DYP and ANAP.

Then it was Ciller's turn to join Refah in approving a vote of no confidence against Yilmaz, after she withdrew her support from the cabinet and called on DYP ministers to boycott their own coalition government. The Yilmaz administration has now been given 45 days to remain in office in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed. If this fails to transpire, President Süleyman Demirel will call fresh elections.

The other force at work is the rising popularity of Refah, which has capitalised on the bitter dispute within the secular mainstream. Refah's first political victory was its success in last December's inconclusive legislative elections, which failed to give any party an outright majority. The party won 158 seats in the 550-member parliament against the DYP's 134 and ANAP's 126. Refah's next triumph, last month, was to get Turkey's constitutional court to rule that the confidence vote won by the coalition government was invalid.

Refah consolidated its political legitimacy by securing 34 per cent of the votes and mayorships in three big cities in last week's local elections, thus strengthening its control over municipal affairs. ANAP won 21 per cent of the poll and the DYP 12 per cent. Analysts believe that this is an indication that public opinion is shifting towards Refah. They predict that if new general elections are held Refah could take more than 30 per cent of the votes, thereby gaining control of parliament.

Behind the power struggle between the different political forces in Turkey is the quest for greater democracy. Refah's anti-corruption campaign

against Ciller began after secular forces blocked its use to power. Protecting the principles of Kemal Ataturk, on which the Turkish modern state has been based since its creation in 1923, was its justification. In response, in March, Aydin Menderes, deputy chairman of Refah, vowed that his party would make every effort to prevent the ANAP-DYP government from remaining in office.

Now, following the collapse of the ANAP-DYP coalition, Refah leader Necmettin Erbakan has been given the mandate to form a government. In order to do so, ANAP or the DYP have to be part of the coalition given that they are the second and third largest parties in parliament. Both rejected a coalition with Refah earlier in the year. Refah publicly declared that it would not rule out an alliance with ANAP, the DYP, or even Left-wing parties like the Republican Peoples Party, a coalition partner of the DYP from 1991 till last September. Refah's Gheoul admitted recently that the party prefers a government comprising the three largest parties, Refah, ANAP and the DYP, with Erbakan at the helm.

However, opposition to a Refah-led government is intense among the country's powerful secular-oriented business leaders, the influential army and Turkey's Western allies. These forces want to see Turkey progress to full membership of the European Union (EU). Turkey's customs union agreement with the EU, which began at the beginning of this year, is a prelude to full EU membership.

Refah is quick to refute accusations that it will steer the country towards an anti-Western stance. Erbakan maintains that his party's popularity is more due to a rejection of weak coalitions which recall the weak Right-wing coalitions of the seventies. He also insists that he will not call for Turkey to pull out of NATO or to withdraw from the customs union with the EU. Nevertheless, there is no

denying Refah's preference for stronger ties with its Arab and Islamic neighbours, which indicates that, under Refah, Turkey's foreign policy priorities would change. Gheoul told the Associated Press news agency this week that Refah would review the country's military pact with Israel if it comes to power. This move might antagonise leaders of the armed forces who regard the pact as a deterrent against neighbouring rivals like Greece, Iran and Syria. During the December election campaign, Erbakan promised to improve relations with Syria, settle the water dispute between the two states amicably and even review the demarcation of their shared borders.

The tide is shifting under the weight of months of political instability in Turkey. Even liberal forces concede that the latest coalition failed to carry through any of the political and economic reforms it championed. No political party has provided a manifesto to tackle the human rights problem, said the socialist bloc in the European Parliament which just concluded a fact-finding mission to Turkey. The government is still unable to deal with the 12-year-old Kurdish insurgency which has claimed around 20,000 lives since 1984. Writers who discuss the Kurdish issue are still subjected to imprisonment and parliament has so far failed to lift the state of emergency in Turkey's southeastern region. Turkey also has to negotiate the last \$221 million slice of a \$899 million standby facility agreed in 1994 with the International Monetary Fund. Annual inflation is running at close to 83 per cent and austerity measures are expected as a means of reducing it. In a concession to the Democratic Left Party which opposes such measures, Yilmaz scrapped a plan to privatise Turkey's social insurance institutions. In so doing he reneged on the former coalition's promise to revive the privatisation programme. Economic troubles and bitter rivalry have cost the secular forces dear.

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THE COFFIN of Kudiratu Abiola is carried through the crowd of mourners and democracy activists to its final resting place in a suburb of Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos. Kudiratu Abiola in happier days, and very much alive, urges Nigerians to vote for her husband Chief Moshood Abiola in the June 1993 elections. He did win, but the Nigerian military authorities annulled the election results and imprisoned him instead (photos:AP)



# Recrimination rocks Nigeria

The killing in cold blood of Kudiratu Abiola last week is a grim reminder that the road trodden by Nigerian democracy activists is fraught with danger, writes Gamal Nkrumah

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened unless it die," goes the biblical saying. Perhaps it is destined that a few more prominent Nigerian democracy activists must kick the bucket before democracy is restored in Nigeria. But has Nigeria's military government taken it upon itself to do away with its detractors one by one? First, the world was outraged by the execution of ethnic Ogoni environmentalist and human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight colleagues of his in the south-eastern Nigerian city of Port Harcourt last November. Now, it is Kudiratu Abiola's murder in cold blood by five unidentified assailants who were seen speeding away in a Peugeot 504 from the scene of the crime that has outraged Nigeria and the entire world.

The road trodden by Nigeria's democracy activists is strewn with dangers. The assassination of Kudiratu Abiola was a chilling reminder that Nigerian democracy activists' chances of ousting the ruling military regime of General Sani Abacha look increasingly remote at present. Kudiratu was fatally shot in the head as her Mercedes-Benz snaked through the Lagos rush-hour traffic. She was in Victoria, an affluent residential island suburb of Lagos, on her way to meet an important Western diplomat. It was a secret rendezvous. Her murder was carefully planned; her chauffeur was also wounded but his life was spared. The military regime feigned innocence. The international community howled its protests, but failed to tighten sanctions against Nigeria.

Kudiratu breathed her last in Eko Hospital, a private clinic in the northern Lagos suburb of Ikeja where she lived. At the time of her death, Kudiratu was engaged in a bitter dispute with the government. A prominent Lagos lawyer herself, she had threatened to file a lawsuit against the Nigerian government because it was withholding millions of dollars owed to her construction company for work it carried out in a new government housing project. Kudiratu Abiola was reportedly detained for a few hours in May for allegedly possessing publications critical of the military regime of General Sani Abacha. She was a political activist in her own right besides being an outspoken advocate of the release of her husband, Alhaji Moshood Abiola, who has been detained on trumped-up treason charges for exactly two years. Married to Chief Abiola in 1973, Kudiratu has managed her husband's business empire and financial affairs since he was incarcerated. She proclaimed in widely publicised statements last

month that the military junta had taken steps to destroy her family financially.

A delegation of senior military officers and government officials headed by Nigerian Chief of Staff General Isahaya Bamaayi offered the government's condolences to the Abiola family at Kudiratu's burial ceremonies in Lagos. To take on the 500,000 ethnic Ogoni of southeastern Nigeria is one thing; to anger the 35 million-strong ethnic Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria is quite another.

Alhaji Abiola, unlike many other African leaders, has refrained from playing the tribal card. He has always been loathe to manipulate tribalism and ethnicity in African and Nigerian politics. Tribal affiliation and immense wealth are no guarantors of political popularity in contemporary Nigeria. True, many of the country's democracy activists hail from the relatively prosperous hinterland of Lagos in the southwestern corner of Africa's most populous nation. But not all ethnic Yoruba millionaires are as popular as Alhaji Abiola, who wooed the presidential elections in June 1993.

There are hundreds of Nigerian millionaires — tens from Abiola's home region of Yorubaland in the southwestern corner of the country. Yorubaland is the economic powerhouse of Nigeria and Lagos its commercial capital. One of Abiola's fellow Yoruba millionaires, Alhaji Wale Olufemi, was hurriedly forced to leave Kudiratu's funeral by angry university students. Folawio, who is regarded as a government stooge by the democracy activists, could not count on the support of the secretary-general of Nigeria's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Alhaji Lateef Adegboye — another Yoruba — who officiated over Kudiratu's burial ceremonies. Abiola, and his wives, have come to personify the nation's struggle for democracy.

Nigerian democracy activists who attended Kudiratu's funeral in Lagos were unanimous in their condemnation of the Nigerian regime. One told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview that the burial ceremonies were reminiscent of a massive open-air political meeting. "University students were especially incensed. They wanted justice to be done," an interviewee told the *Weekly*. "The students saw Mrs Abiola's funeral as a rare opportunity to air their grievances in a country where freedom of expression has been seriously curtailed," added another.

Personally, I was deeply disturbed by Kudiratu Abiola's untimely demise. One of the first magazines I wrote for was *African Concord*. Chief Mos-

hood Abiola was the publisher. Abiola's New Year's Eve parties were annual events that held London's one million-strong African community enthralled in the 1980s. The guest list usually read like a who's who of African literary and political celebrities. These were memorable occasions where his now deceased wife, Kudiratu, was invariably the incontestable belle of the ball. Kudiratu's wit and political acumen animated many an otherwise dry political discussion. Her co-wife, Doyin Abiola, was editor-in-chief of Abiola's *African Concord*. Both took their work very seriously. Abiola, in sharp contrast to most other African leaders, had learnt to trust implicitly the professionalism of his wives. All three, leading proponents of the democratisation process in Nigeria and the entire African continent, were also dedicated to the pan-Africanist cause.

Abiola is a Muslim leader who has never been considered an Islamist either inside or outside Nigeria. He was always one to realise that the road of disunity leads to defeat. He never used religion as a political trump card in a Muslim majority nation like Nigeria. Kudiratu, a devout Muslim like her husband, was deeply involved in charitable work in Nigeria, throughout Africa and among the African diaspora in Europe and the Americas. Her untimely death is another nail in the coffin of the ruling Nigerian military junta.

"Mrs Abiola's murder is clearly part of a campaign by the military junta to eliminate Nigerian pro-democracy activists and silence its critics," said the spokesman of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, Willie Nwido, in Johannesburg, South Africa, last weekend. Kudiratu Abiola's murder "was no coincidence and bears the hallmark of assassinations of other prominent pro-democracy activists" in Nigeria, he added.

The Americans were more cautious. "We urge the government of Nigeria to diligently pursue the killers and ensure that they are identified and duly prosecuted in an open court of law," said United States State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns last week in Washington. US Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights John Shattuck, who met Kudiratu Abiola a few days before she was murdered, said, "I made it very clear in my meetings [with Nigerian officials] that governments are very actively accelerating their discussions of sanctions. They are well aware that the international community is actively pressing to look forward to more measures if changes don't occur." Well-meaning or

not, Western protestations sound hollow and appear to be as innocuous as ever. At any rate, they fall on deaf ears in the Nigerian capital Abuja and are summarily ignored and scoffed at in the country's military barracks.

Nigeria until recently had just about the liveliest free press on the African continent. The Abiolas — husband and wives — contributed an awful lot to enlivening the traditionally boisterous Nigerian press. All political views were aired. National concerns were publicly debated. Today, things have sadly changed. The progression from one extreme to another was dramatic. Democratic transition in Africa is moving at a snail's pace — and Nigeria is a sad example. The endless progression of fraudulent elections, military coups and counter-coups has come to dominate the political scene on the continent. People like the Abiolas did their bit to arrest the nose-dive slide into the cruel world of military authoritarianism, but the country's legal system is now subject to the dictates of the ruling junta. Millionaires or not, the Nigerian masses much preferred the Abiolas and their ilk among the civilian politicians to the generals.

South African President Nelson Mandela called the killing of Kudiratu Abiola a "heinous act". But South Africa has no economic clout as far as Nigeria is concerned. Nothing in the week that has elapsed since the assassination of Kudiratu Abiola suggests Nigeria's military rulers are repentant. Why should they? After noisy outbursts and temper tantrums by Western diplomats and governments about human rights violations in Nigeria, business is always business as usual in a matter of weeks or a few months. It is as if the world is lending a helping hand to the military regime to wriggle out of the mire of instituting a reign of terror in Nigeria. The political consequences for Nigeria, and Africa, of the world's lackadaisical response to Kudiratu Abiola's assassination may be far-reaching.

The path of Nigeria's democratisation process is strewn with obstacles. And Western business interests in the oil-rich country do not help the cause of democracy. Nigeria is the US's largest supplier of crude oil. Western multinationals are reaping huge profits from their Nigerian concerns. Shell is investing some \$3.6 billion in a liquefied natural gas project in Nigeria. Even Western airlines cannot afford to stop their flights into Nigerian international airports because they would be losing millions of dollars worth of business. British Airways makes some \$500 million a week from its flights to Nigeria.

## Contesting the Kremlin

After making a lightning trip to Chechnya last week, Russian President Boris Yeltsin has continued to climb in pre-election polls, writes Abdel-Malek Khalil from Moscow.

The faltering steps of the nascent parliamentary democracy in Russia are to be given a tremendous boost if the Russian presidential elections, scheduled for 16 June, run smoothly and are considered fair by the international community. The various presidential candidates boast that they will succeed. Russian President Boris Yeltsin hopes that he will not have to face Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov in a run-off on 7 July.

Yeltsin is very confident of winning — but not of winning outright. He recently reassured his supporters that he will renew his term in office. His popularity has continued to rise in pre-election polls. But his main rival continues to be very popular at the grassroots level. All observers are agreed that next Sunday's elections are going to be a very close race.

Most of the presidential hopefuls haven't a chance in hell of winning the forthcoming elections, but they are desperately hanging on. The only exception to the rule appears to be Aman Tuleyev, a Leftist presidential candidate from mineral-rich Siberia. A geologist, Tuleyev recently dropped his name from the list of presidential hopefuls in favour of Communist leader Zyuganov. Tuleyev said that Zyuganov offers Russia the best chance of ridding itself of the pitfalls of the market economy. "Yeltsin's market reforms have put Russia on its knees," Tuleyev said recently.

The other 10 contestants are sure of getting the support of at least one million voters between them. Not then Russia is a huge country with a population of over 165 million. Barring Yeltsin and Zyuganov, the most important candidates are ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Centre-Right Grigory Yavlenskiy, Right-wing General Aleksandr Lebed and former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Whoever wins will lead Russia into the 21st century.

Zhirinovskiy appeals to the millions of angry young Russians disenchanted with Yeltsin's economic reforms and sceptical about the Communists' intentions. A recent poll by the Russian Centre for Public Opinion and Market Research (VSIOM) claimed that 33 per cent of those responding to its latest poll, taken a week before the actual presidential poll, said they would vote for Yeltsin. Some 26 per cent said they would vote for Zyuganov. If the two qualified for a second round on 7 July, Yeltsin's lead over Zyuganov would rise considerably, the VSIOM poll said. Zyuganov's supporters are hoping that he wins at least 51 per cent of the vote in the first round of the elections. He would then not have to face Yeltsin again in a second round in the first week of July, when Yeltsin could muster some votes from the supporters of candidates who had dropped out of the race.

There are signs that a vicious campaign is under way to discredit the Communists. The popular daily *Kommunisticheskaya Pravda* recently published what it claimed was a secret "manifesto" of Zyuganov's Communist Party, revealing plans to restrict foreign travel for Russians and dismantle Yeltsin's privatisation programme. The Communist Party refuted the allegations as a fabrication and warned that such claims were designed to make the Communists unpopular. Zyuganov added that he expected Yeltsin and his corrupt team to falsify the election results. Zyuganov is critical of some of the shortcomings of the former Communist system. He has openly been unsympathetic towards the Soviet leadership during the era of Leonid Brezhnev and Gorbachev. "The party claimed a monopoly on everything: property, ideas, truth," he confessed. "We could not return to that even if we wanted," he reassured those who are sceptical of his intentions and plans. "Yeltsin has accumulated more power than the czar and the secretary-general put together," Zyuganov said recently.

Many Russians consider Zyuganov as a true patriot who genuinely wants to save his country from the ravishes of rampant corruption, media domination of the black economy and what is perceived as the general chaos of the free market economy. Falling standards of living, the war in Chechnya and uncertainty about the country's future remain the greatest worries of the Russian people. Zyuganov presents himself as the champion of the underdog and of the ordinary Russian citizen. As such he hopes to win votes and to oust Yeltsin.

## China nuclear blast

LAST Saturday, Beijing attracted worldwide criticism by conducting a nuclear weapons test, the 44th since it detonated its first atomic bomb in 1964. But the news was coupled with a cheering promise from China to suspend further weapons tests from September, after just one more explosion.

The pledge from the last of the five big nuclear powers still conducting nuclear arms tests — the other four being Britain, France, Russia and the United States — came on the heels of an unexpected softening of the Chinese position on nuclear tests last week to delegates attending the 38-nation UN Disarmament Conference in Geneva. The conference was meeting to finalise a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by 28 June, after two and a half years of difficult talks. The treaty is to be put to the UN General Assembly in New York in September. In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry statement said China would conduct one more test before September to ensure the safety of its nuclear weapons.

The latest underground test was at Lop Nor in China's remote northwest. It was the country's first blast of 1996, following similar explosions in May and August of last year. The US joined the chorus of anger unleashed worldwide by China's decision to carry out a penultimate nuclear weapons blast amid international efforts to clinch a global test ban.

## Africa military meeting

ARMED forces commanders from a score of African countries meeting in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, have recommended greater measures for aiding peacekeeping missions on the continent. They include a central military planning unit to be attached to the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) headquarters and increased aid from the United Nations. The meeting gathered military top brass from the 16 members of the OAU's conflict prevention and management body, set up in 1993, and from half a dozen other countries.

The planning unit would decide on and prepare peacekeeping missions and exercise overall military command in them. The meeting also proposed that regional logistics bases be set up and a UN training programme be implemented for peacekeepers. Special contingents would also be formed to remain on standby until needed for operations or support. On the question of funding, the military leaders suggested that the UN could help out.

Compiled by Heba Samir



## Ulster talks

HISTORIC Northern Ireland peace talks resumed on a shaky footing on Tuesday with both the designated American chairmen George Mitchell and the Sinn Féin republicans on the outside looking in. Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and one of 10 political parties elected on 30 May to sit at the peace table, was turned away at the gate because the IRA had not renewed a critical ceasefire.

Mitchell, a former US senator and the last-minute choice of Dublin and London to chair both the plenary session and the all-important disarmament sub-committee, was pacing the halls after the unionists mounted a lightning attack on his neutrality. The multi-party talks, instead of moving on Tuesday to the nuts and bolts of a peace agreement, were having to deal with the product of numerous late-night bartering sessions on the touchy question of a chairman.

Protestant leaders demand Northern Ireland's continued union with Britain, while minority Catholics want political ties with the independent, predominantly Catholic Irish Republic. The negotiations involving both governments and nine parties are supposed to agree on a new system for sharing power.

Protestant objections to Mitchell centre on what they see as interference by a US administration that is too friendly with the IRA's allies. Protestants have also made pointed references to Mitchell's Catholic faith.

Both London and Dublin have been adamant from the outset that the only way Sinn Féin can sit at the peace table is if the IRA restores the 17-month truce it broke off with a bomb in London this February.



Strives on the privatisation front are being coupled with efforts to relieve other companies of their debt. Niveen Wahish reports

## Swap or drop

A public sector metallurgical company, well in the red, is seeking refinancing from banks in the form of debt-for-equity swaps

Efforts by the Holding Company for Metallurgical Industries (HCM) are currently underway to turn around the financial position of El-Nasr Castings Company (ENCC) by encouraging debtors to exchange the balance of ENCC's debts for company shares. The ENCC is one of the largest iron and steel foundries in the Middle East, and produces a wide range of ductile iron pipes for water, sewage and other fluids, valves, fire hydrants and other casting products.

According to Wadie Meshreki, head of HCM's costs department, the ENCC owes large sums of money to three national banks—Banque Misr (BM), the Bank of Alexandria (BA) and the National Investment Bank (NIB). The company had originally borrowed this money in the form of long-term loans for use in establishing new projects. Three years ago, Meshreki said, the HCM began negotiations with the three banks involved to convince them to make a debt swap—exchanging the loans for a stake in the company. "The HCM was able to move over about 68 per cent of the company's shares to the banks," he said. The holding company retains the remaining 32 per cent.

"Now, we are trying to convince the banks to increase their share in the company's capital," noted Meshreki, adding that this is the only way to turn the company around. "Repaying the loans and servicing the debt is consuming all the profits of the company."

The ENCC, he stated, reported losses of around LE50 million during fiscal 1994-95.

Since the company is 68 per cent owned by the banks, it will no longer fall under the purview of Public Sector Law 203 of 1991. It

is now subject to Companies Law 159 of 1991. Accordingly steps are currently being taken to include representatives of the banks on the company's board of directors.

But these changes, Meshreki said, will not affect the workers in any negative way. In fact, he hopes their situation will improve. "Once the position of the company improves, it will start making profits which will, in turn, be reflected in the workers' incomes," he stated.

Although the amount of the debt swapped into capital by the creditors is considerable, said Abdel-Hamid El-Sayed, head of the National Investment Bank's Policies, Programs and Follow-up Department, the remaining debt is still huge. The NIB has already swapped LE70 million of an original debt totalling approximately LE300 million. The BA swapped LE35 million of LE450 million debt, while the BM swapped LE30 million of a LE270 million debt. Moreover, the HCM has written off about LE43 million of the ENCC's losses, and has promised to cancel another LE17 million at a later stage.

The ENCC also owes the German Bank for Reconstruction, (KFW), which extends assistance to developing countries, a sizable sum. El-Sayed said that the company's debt to KFW will be repaid and will not be swapped for a stake in the company.

In addition to the original debt, noted El-Sayed, the company is also burdened with debt servicing payments totalling LE90 million per year.

The company, he said, accumulated these debts because its investments far exceeded its capital, which, when it was established, was LE65 million. Its investment, however, exceeded LE1

billion. "Most public sector companies have a nominal capital," El-Sayed explained, adding that these companies later venture into investments to expand their business and usually depend on loans to finance their projects. However, these investments are not added to the capital. "There must be a constant adjustment between the capital and the investments," he said.

By forgiving a portion of the debt, the banks aim to adjust the financial position of the company. "In this way the debt burden will be lighter and the company will be able to pay its debts," said El-Sayed. The company's position, he said, is "promising, and its products are in high demand in a number of Arab and European countries."

"Once the financial structure is improved it will become more competitive, and profitable," El-Sayed predicted. But, "we must look at its production without the burden it has to carry."

After adjusting the ENCC's financial structure, it will be privatised, said El-Sayed. "We want to keep this company afloat because what it produces is needed by the local market, otherwise we will need to import the products it produces," he said.

"Our aim is not to retain ownership of the ENCC, but if we put it up for sale today, nobody will buy it. But in two years, once reforms have been enacted, it will sell for a better price," he stated.

"As owners we do not stand to gain anything at the moment," El-Sayed said. The banks, he added, had no choice since they were not recouping their money. Consequently, the banks are also considering rescheduling the remainder of the debt.

## Going once...

The shares of three public sector companies are set to go on the auction block, a government spokesman announced recently. The Ameriya Cement Company and the General Company for Ceramics and Porcelain (Stiny) will each put up for sale 40 per cent, while a 10 per cent stake in the Nile Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company has been offered, all through a competitive bidding system.

Anchor investors are the main target, said Foad Abdel-Wahab, executive director of the Public Enterprise Office, because the government feels they hold in their hands the solutions these companies need.

"We want one, or a group, of investors with enough expertise to turn the companies around," he said. What these companies need, added Abdel-Wahab, is someone with the ability to pump into the company new investments, and who is capable of bringing in new equipment, introducing new packaging and properly marketing the companies' products. Anchor investors, he said, fit the bill.

"We're looking for investors who have the vision to do what they want to do with the companies," explained Abdel-Wahab. This, in turn, will help create new jobs as a result of the expansion of the production lines.

According to Abdel-Wahab, the shares are for sale to both local and foreign investors. Should these companies come under the management of an international firm, he said, sales of the products will be boosted and, at the same time, other foreign investors will be encouraged to tap into the Egyptian market. However, this will not be possible if the ownership of the companies is distributed among several small investors.

But, advantageous as this kind of sale may be, Abdel-Wahab noted that this type of sale will not be applied to all public sector companies. "I don't think that this will become a trend, although it would be better since we want to avoid distributing

Three more public sector companies go on the auction block. They are looking for the few big buyers, rather than the many small investors

the ownership of the companies among several investors," he said.

The advantage of a bidding system for the sale of shares is that it helps to raise the price of the shares. "Traditionally, when an investor acquires a majority stake in a company, they have to pay 15 to 20 per cent more than if it was sold to the public," explained Abdel-Wahab.

The basic aim of competitive bidding is to maximise the government's share from the proceeds of the sale, added Hisham El-Khanzidar, assistant manager of the Egyptian Financial Group (EFG), one of the companies administering the sale of the Ameriya Cement Company. If the shares are offered for public subscription, a fixed price would have to be set, but by requesting bids in sealed envelopes, there's a better chance that the price will be increased. Moreover, this system allows the company to bargain with the bidders over better terms and prices. Finally, this system allows large investors to purchase a bigger share of the company than they could have if the sale was open to the public.

To this end, the EFG's sales pitch targets both investors who want a large chunk of the company and those who want to buy it, lock, stock and barrel.

In anticipation of a larger-than-expected demand, Ameriya and the Ceramics and Porcelain Company announced that more than 40 per cent of the companies' shares could be put up for sale if the need arises. "This is another way of speeding up the privatisation process," said El-Khanzidar. No additional shares of the Nile Pharmaceuticals Company,

however, will be offered since the government intends to hold onto majority stakes in strategic industries such as pharmaceuticals and mills. "The government does not feel comfortable with the idea that more than 40 per cent of these kinds of companies be sold to the private sector," he stated.

The 10 per cent share offering in the Nile Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company, 300,000 shares, is the second tranche to be put up for sale in this company. The first was in May 1995, during which 20 per cent of the company, or 600,000 shares, was sold. Five per cent went to the company's employees, another 5 per cent to the Employee Shareholders' Association (ESA) and 10 per cent to the public.

The Ameriya Cement Company is putting up 8 million shares, or 40 per cent of the company's capital. The minimum bid is for 50,000 shares. Once concluded, the sale will have resulted in a decline in the Holding Company for Metallurgical Industries' ownership in the company from 77.5 per cent to 37.5 per cent. Two other tranches have already been offered, the first in 1994 and the second in 1995, through which, 12.5 per cent of the stock went to the public and 10 per cent to the company's ESA.

Half a million shares in the General Company for Ceramics and Porcelain Company are up for sale, but the sale may be upped for the benefit of investment funds who wish to buy into the company. Previously, 33.6 per cent of the company's shares were sold to its ESA and the private sector.

To date, only three companies have been sold as a whole to the private sector. These include the Egyptian Bottling Company, which has been bottling Pepsi-Cola International under franchise since 1949, Al-Nasr Bottling Company, which bottled Coca-Cola under license and El-Nasr Steam Boilers.

## The Seoul of Cairo

Brush-fire technological advances have knocked down previously uncrossed cultural barriers, bridging political gaps, underscoring the significance of the growing world community. In such a light, the advertising field takes on heightened importance.

As a precursor to the 1998 International Advertising Association (IAA) Congress which will be held in Seoul, President Mubarak welcomed the 3,000 delegates to the conference, asserting the importance of the media in bringing the nations of the world closer.

In a message delivered during the opening of the "Egyptian Night" in Seoul last Sunday, President Mubarak welcomed the 3,000 delegates to the conference, asserting the importance of the media in bringing the nations of the world closer. The "Egyptian Night" served as an information kit of sorts that provided delegates with an overview of Egyptian civilisation and its people.

Below is the text of Mubarak's message: "Ladies and gentlemen, members of the 35th IAA world congress, it gives me pleasure to take this opportunity to welcome you to this evening's festivities and to invite you to become acquainted with the 36th IAA world congress, which will be held in Cairo in May 1998.

I am certain that when you come to Cairo to share in the work of your next congress, you will be given the opportunity to become closely acquainted with Egypt, the people and the country.

You are sure to enjoy visiting its unique antiquities, which are a witness to 7000 years of ancient civilisation and learning of its modern renaissance, making you less cognizant of the country's frailties.

"Interaction" is the theme of the Cairo congress and the choice of the theme and venue cannot be more fitting. The Egyptian civilisation is synonymous with communication and interaction between people, cultures and religions. Egypt's history, which is unique, is evidence enough that this interaction is not only possible but is also desirable and full of riches.

The revolution in communications had made of our world a small global village, just as the media in Egypt in all their forms, have been able to cover a great deal of ground in keeping pace with this revolution to find for themselves a fitting place on the international map of information.

Information's creative scopes can greatly contribute towards building bridges and consolidating understanding between cultures and civilisations, contributing toward peace, security and economic welfare in every part of the world.

I therefore invite you to continue your constructive efforts, in order to realise these noble goals, in bidding you farewell. I take this opportunity to congratulate you on the success of your 35th IAA world congress and look forward to welcoming you to Cairo in May 1998.

Have a good evening."

## Market report

STILL on the slide for the second week in a row, the General Market Index (GMI) levelled off at 203 points for the week ending 6 June. However, the value of transactions increased to LE199.41 million compared to LE130 million the week before.

Mirroring the GMI's slump, the index for the manufacturing sector fell by 1.67 points to close at 141.22, which shows the National Alexandria Iron and Steel Company losing LE9 per share to close at LE152. El-Nasr Clothing and Textile Company's (KABO) fell by LE7.3 to level off at LE146,

while those of the Universal Adhesive Products Company topped them all in the losing streak. The company's shares lost 17.71 per cent of their value to close at LE39.5.

However, breaking away from the pack, 17 companies witnessed an increase in their share value. Putting up 10 per cent of its shares for public subscription, trading in the share of the South Cairo Mills Company accounted for 34.36 per cent of the market's total transactions. In all, 1.5 million of its shares changed hands, pushing up the share value by 160 per cent before they levelled off

at LE26. Following reports that a 40 per cent stake in the Ameriya Cement Company would be offered to an anchor investor, the company's shares gained LE1.15 to close at LE47.15.

The index for the financial sector inched down by 0.47 points to close at 205.32 points. Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) lost LE1 to settle at LE440, while those of the Medinat Nasr

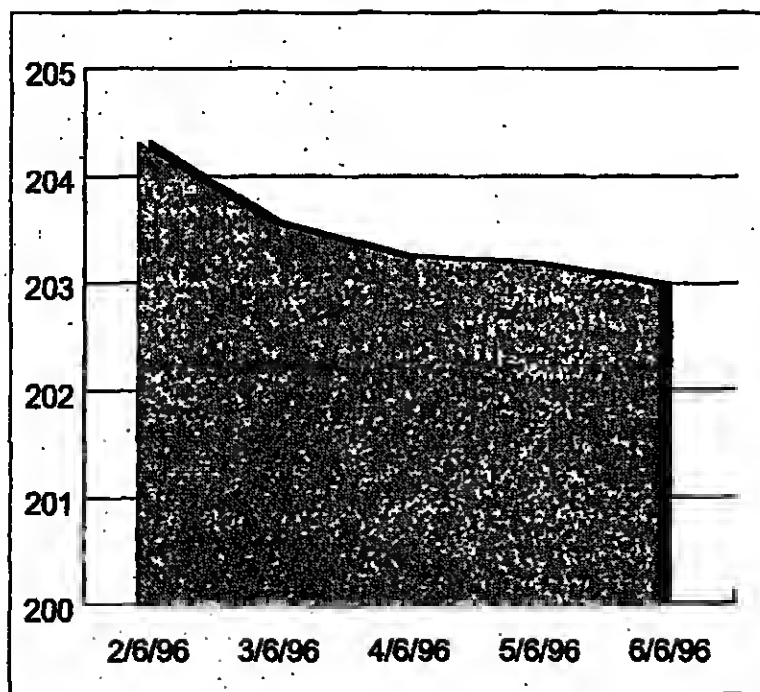
Housing and Development Company witnessed an LE3.4 increase to close at LE83.65 per share. The Heliopolis Housing and Development Company's shares crept up with an LE2 gain to close at LE215.

Also active during the week's trading action was the bond market, with bond transactions accounting for 16.79 per cent of total market dealings. Citibank's bonds, alone, cornered 15.44 per cent of the total, as LE30

million in bonds were traded. If the other sectors seem to be so-sawing, then the service sector is at least consistent—consistently weak. The sector's index lost 0.63 points to close at 137.65.

During a week's worth of trading, the share value of 27 companies increased, that of 25 decreased and 28 remained unchanged.

Edited by Ghada Ragab



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Le logement dans tous ses états
- Le Caire, Damas, Amman  
Les sommets arabes, avertissement à Israël
- Gamal Bayoumi,  
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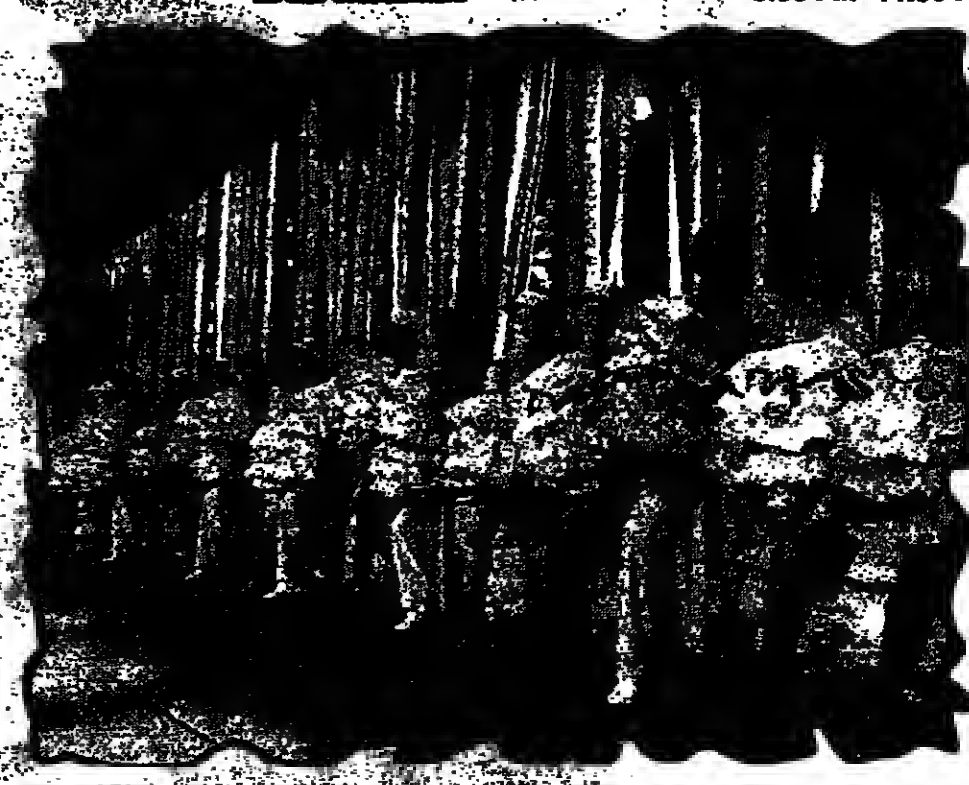
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## Al-Ahram Weekly

### Netanyahu's nuances

Fear, Netanyahu would have Israelis believe, is of more importance than peace. Compromise, he adds, is possible, but only on Israeli terms — ones which are diametrically opposed to any sort of land-for-peace deal with Syria, for example. On the issue of Palestinian self-determination, Netanyahu's notion of "generous autonomy" is where Palestinian foreign policy and security issues are dominated by Israel. And Jerusalem will remain 100 per cent in Israeli hands.

Operating from what he believes to be a stronger political position, he expects that the Arab world will simply lower its expectations when confronted with his intransigence and right-wing political agenda. In short, he expects that when he flexes his muscles, it will be Arab shirts that are torn at their seams.

But during the elections, he stressed his commitment to continuing the steps taken by Peres, stating that he intends to remain true to the Oslo Accords. Nonetheless, he is staunchly in favour of expanding Jewish settlements. If he is rejecting these concessions, then exactly on what grounds are the final status negotiations supposed to continue. Par for the course, Israeli vacillation comes at the price of peace and regional security and Netanyahu's back sliding amounts to little more than a political Watson of sorts.

Israelis themselves, however, are not convinced with what he says. A sizable majority of them favour a peace realised through varying degrees of compromise. For these moderates, as much as for the Arab world, the real issues were hope and opportunity, with security a partner to the peace process. Netanyahu, however, is intent on placing the fate of the region at the hands of a few Right-wing extremists to whom he owes political favours.

In the face of such hypocrisy, the Arabs, too long on the receiving end of blows ensuing from Israeli political manoeuvring, will convene an Arab summit next week. While the summit aims at uniting the Arab world, one thing is already agreed — the only grounds upon which peace can take root are those not dictated by Israel.

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# The politics of housing rights

Both sprawling shantytowns and vacant penthouses are well-known facts of life in the Third World. But Habitat II, argues **Milad Hanna**, may offer necessary solutions to the chaos that characterises the politics of housing

The Habitat conference, currently being held in Istanbul, the last UN conference of the century, crowns the series of conferences sponsored by the UN and affiliated agencies. Of these conferences, the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 received the most world-wide attention.

The Habitat conference should be characterised by similar, if not greater, scope. More significantly, the discussions and resolutions of previous conferences — on the population, environment, and women — should inform this conference. After all, these and other issues are directly related to an evolving understanding of urban development, housing communities and modern cities that guarantee humanity's right to better shelter in a healthier urban or rural environment.

Yet the reaction of international public opinion so far has not been as passionate toward the issue of human settlements as it has been with respect to issues dealt with in previous conferences. This is indeed curious, since the problems of the housing shortage, informal settlements and inadequate utilities have direct bearing on social, economic and political stability.

The secret of this lack of concern lies in the fact that officials, intellectuals and the general public share the common perception that the housing problem is an issue for specialists, involving the technical aspects of architecture and engineering. This is not at all the case. The world, as the saying has it, has become a village. People have higher aspirations and greater

expectations. Citizens know they have the right to demand their share of clean water and a reasonable patch of property that they can call home.

An enormous segment of the world's population, however, has been dispossessed and deprived of this right. The market mechanisms that govern much of our economy have resulted in housing arrangements ranging from direct ownership in condominiums and rentals, yet the difficulties involved in actually obtaining adequate housing have forced thousands of young people to defer marriage, while countless others have been compelled to abandon the hope of a home in an officially designated residential neighbourhood and to move into shantytowns.

At first, the government took the same approach toward informal settlements as it did toward terrorism. Soon, however, it discovered that in both cases repression was ineffective and that both problems were too complex to be handled by police measures alone. Moreover, an understanding began to develop that terrorism and marginal housing were perhaps intricately connected by a web of social and economic factors.

But a housing policy, from the national to the village level, is unlike any other government policy. It is closer to an ideological vision which is ultimately transformed into a plan mobilising the legislative, technical and financial resources and human skills necessary to seeing the vision through, step by step, to its implementation. Whether a project aims to construct an entire city

or a suburb, provide low-cost housing to needy segments of society, or simply to provide the infrastructure for private residential construction, it stems from a set of social and humanitarian principles and is founded upon an assessment of needs balanced against potential costs and returns.

Housing is a compound commodity. Manufacturing it requires, first, a vacant plot of land which is supplied with essential utilities — water, waste disposal, electricity, roads, etc. Land is a non-renewable resource. As such, it requires a policy of its own for exploitation and marketing, involving a delicate balance between supply and demand, environmental preservation, land conservation, real estate investment and urban development needs.

Housing cannot be manufactured in a factory. Still, many of its component materials are manufactured independently and off-site in what are essentially separate industries. Any housing policy must take into account availability and cost of raw materials, processing technology, packaging, transportation and delivery — that is, if these exist locally. If not, import feasibility studies must be conducted. However grandiose the ambitions of a country may be, it is the housing specialist's job to ensure that construction projects remain within the country's available means. Ambitious schemes have often floundered and costs soared beyond original projections because comprehensive planning, in light of available resources and economic re-

alities, was lacking.

Housing and urban development is a time-consuming, multi-phased process. It involves the assessment of needs, planning, legislation, design, and the submission of tenders, all of which require lengthy deliberations before construction begins. Construction itself can take several years. This means that the officials responsible for initiating a project may not be the same officials who see it to completion. This means that housing policy-makers must be made of a special metal. They must possess that extra drive, conviction and dedication to society that enables them to pursue their goals, even with the knowledge that they may not see their project through to its final stage.

Once completed, housing is a commodity that cannot be relocated. Nor can it be fundamentally altered without considerable expense. If it turns out that it does not attract the public, as is the case with the thousands of homes that have remained vacant for years in the satellite cities, it cannot be lifted off the ground and transplanted to areas where there is a clear housing shortage and high demand. If it further ensues that a housing policy has produced a considerable surplus of luxury housing (as is the case in Cairo and Alexandria) while there is tremendous demand for low-income housing, modifying luxury housing to meet demand is not particularly cost-effective, if it is at all possible.

In other words, those who formulate the country's housing policy must also

be, to a certain extent, demographers and social scientists. They have to have a fairly thorough knowledge of the groups for whom housing is to be designed, and of their needs in terms of space, work opportunities, transportation, shopping, schooling, etc. They must strike a balance between the demands of the well-to-do and those of the limited-income sectors of society, but also between the demands of urban inhabitants and those of country dwellers. Given the profound ramifications of any housing policy on all sectors of the population, society cannot afford to have hasty or short-sighted policy makers, who yield too readily to the loudest and most influential voices. The social and material costs of folly can be too exorbitant to rectify.

Drafting and implementing a housing policy, as the above implies, is politics. This is not the case in the Third World, where housing policies are in a state of utter chaos. Their politicians lack any concept of the science and economics of housing. Rather, the emphasis is on power, security and control. Hence the deplorable state of housing for the poor, whose only alternative are the shantytowns. It should be emphasised, however, that dealing with the complex issues which face Third World countries attempting to develop an appropriate housing policy is no easy task. This is why Habitat II is particularly timely.

The writer is a housing expert and a former head of the People's Assembly's Housing Committee.

## First Israel, now Russia

**Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** argues that while bipolarity is over as a global game, it continues to dominate internal Israeli politics and questions whether the same applies to Russia

The signs are that, even though Netanyahu named David Levy, not the most hawkish of his lieutenants, as his foreign minister, and even after the Damascus tripartite summit's resolution to convene an all-Arab summit, the new Israeli leader is likely to confirm his detractors' worst fears and disappoint those who hope he will show some moderation. Netanyahu is something of a dark horse. Still in his forties, his leadership qualities have not been tested, and he is known only for his firebrand style and hard-line rhetoric outside any official responsibility. Surrounded by such veteran right-wing extremists as Ariel Sharon and Rafael Eitan, Netanyahu must prove himself up to the mark in their eyes.

Netanyahu's strategy will be informed by the awareness that he owes his victory to those of his fellow-countrymen who voted against Peres, not only because they opposed his peace policy, which they accuse of compromising Israel's security, but also because they resented the Clinton administration's partisan support for Peres against his opponent in a blatant intervention in internal Israeli politics. Although his support of Peres was in fact support for the peace process, Clinton lost no time in trying to mend his fences with the Israeli prime minister-elect. In his congratulatory phone call to Netanyahu, Clinton did not even mention the word peace, but affirmed Washington's unconditional support for Israel. This tacit admission that, with the American presidential elections coming up in five months' time, Clinton is more dependent on his Jewish lobby at home than Netanyahu is dependent on him, can only further embolden Netanyahu in his defiance.

World leaders are treading softly with Netanyahu in an attempt to moderate his bellicosity, reminding him gently that Israel is bound by its adherence to peace accords signed in the presence of the great powers. They also remind him that he won by a very narrow margin, mainly thanks to the religious parties which owe Likud no loyalty, as well as to Peres' mistakes which, with the Qana massacre, deprived him of the crucial votes of many Israeli-Arabs. This insidious form of pressure has prompted Netanyahu to announce that he will be the prime

minister of all Israelis, not only of those who voted for him. His statement encouraged certain prominent figures in the Labour Party, and even some Likud leaders, (notably former party chief Shamir), to propose the creation of a national coalition government along the lines of the Shamir-Peres *cobhabition* experience a few years ago, in which the two men alternated as prime minister.

Under Israel's new election law, a repeat performance of this experience would allow Netanyahu to retain the premiership all through. The problem with this proposal is that it comes up against the sharp rift in Israeli society between two visions of the country's future: Likud's, in which Israel's survival, and hence peace, can only be achieved through military deterrence, and Labour's, or rather, Peres', in which peace also requires economic incentives, such as the Middle East market. Can these two visions be reconciled, or will Israel continue to be marked by a deep bipolarity?

Though bipolarity has disappeared at the global level, it still remains tenaciously present in given societies, notably Israel. The present period has witnessed the relatively smooth rotation of power in a number of countries: from Left to Right in France and Spain, and from Right to Left in Italy. With the Russian elections coming up this week, it is worth asking whether the smooth European alternance scenario or the Israeli deeply polarised one will prevail in Russia, one of the two poles of the previous bipolar world order.

Even if the incumbent Russian president is re-elected, the Yeltsin era seems to be over. Not only has his rule over the last five years failed to achieve the promised results, but it threatens to expose Russia to civil war and widespread chaos. Civil war has already erupted in Chechnya, and can erupt over similar ethnic and nationalist grievances elsewhere in this vast country that is now no longer under the discipline of Soviet ideology. It is clear that there is an urgent need for a new rationale that is neither unbridled liberalism nor old-style communism. So far, attention in the electoral campaign has been focused on preserving Russia's status as a Great Power, irrespective of ideology and with a tacit

nod to a Slavic identity based on state supremacy without discouraging privatisation. This is a common denominator among all the candidates running for the presidency, regardless of their different political platforms, suggesting that Russia is well on its way towards a post-bipolar rationale.

Should Yeltsin lose the election, he cannot legally be forced out of the Kremlin, although he would be constitutionally barred from running for a third term. Even if his communist rival Zyuganov wins, he would probably be willing to accept a *cobhabition* experience *a la française*. Zyuganov has made a point of reassuring the international community that he has no intention of turning the clock back; he avoids talking ideology, is careful not to cut his bridges with the International Monetary Fund, and tries to win over a variety of constituencies. Indeed, his behaviour has been compared to that of the late French President François Mitterrand, famous for his nuances and ambivalences.

Russia might thus be searching for a third project modelled neither on the Soviet Union under Brezhnev nor on Russia under Yeltsin, some new version of the Gorbachev model, more precisely, a neo-Gorbachevism without Gorbachev. Though the last Soviet president has put himself forward as a candidate for the presidency, polls give him no more than 2 per cent of the vote: *perestroika*, still widely acclaimed abroad, is now harshly judged in Russia as the triggering factor of its present ordeals.

Russia can neither ignore its identity and cultural legacy nor the transformations underway worldwide. The question is which of these two factors will ultimately prevail. Does what applies to Israel also apply to Russia, or can Israel use its special status in the West to defy the rules of the new world game, while Russia cannot? But even if Netanyahu can dismiss an Arab summit as nothing more than a muscle-flexing exercise, he will find it hard to justify his intransigence, particularly to the US, if it drives even the moderate Arab regimes to give up on the entire peace process, thus exposing the whole region — the world's most important reservoir of oil — to unprecedented upheavals and anarchy.

## Alexandria for the Egyptians

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

When the Capitulations were abolished, foreigners in Alexandria were forced to change their attitude. They no longer owned the country; we Egyptians were no longer second-class citizens. They realised that they and we would be appearing before the same magistrates, so we began to feel more at ease. The characteristics of European life in Alexandria were still very present, but once the Capitulations were abolished, they became accessible to us as well.

The waiters in the restaurants of first-class hotels used to be dressed in frock-coats, such as I had only seen the minister of foreign affairs wear. So I used to call the waiters "Tharwat Pasha". When the waiter brought me my *narghileh*, I used to tell my friends: "Here comes Tharwat Pasha with my *narghileh*!" At times I would go to Athineos, which we had never frequented before, and have breakfast, which was the cheapest meal. Once I found myself sitting near a table full of notables, among them Osman Pasha Mohammar. He was explaining to the well-known Wafdist minister, Mahmoud Ghaleb Pasha the secret of his longevity and good health: "Eat fava beans for dinner," he said, and went on to advise him how best to prepare these beans, and how much oil and lemon to add, as though prescribing a medicine.

As for Ghaleb Pasha, he frequently spent the evening at the Chatby Casino, where the best foreign shows could be seen, with Sheikh Bishri, a well-known journalist and writer and the son of the Sheikh of Al-Azhar. The two of them would leave after the show, and as soon as we saw them passing through the Casino doors we would applaud them, wishing them and the Wafdist a long life. Sheikh Bishri would then call out to us: "This is not the time, son, this is not the time!"

In short, Alexandria was a European city, but belonged to us — the Egyptians.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

### The Press This Week

**Al-Akhbari:** "The new press law... is a distorted version of old laws... not fit for the future. With all due respect to those who participated in formulating this law, their thoughts have been confined to defining the penalties to be applied to journalists rather than looking at the Egyptian press as a profession going through a difficult period and confronted by numerous threats both internally and externally."  
(Said Sonbol, 9 June)

**Al-Wafd:** "The crisis of the Egyptian press is similar to that of peace in Israel. The Likud government talks about peace and sings its praises while working to destroy it. The same is true in Egypt. Officials declare that they are all for press freedom while getting a noose ready to strangle it and preparing the prisons to receive journalists whom, they believe, still need to be reprimanded and disciplined!"  
(Gamal Badawi, 9 June)

**Al-Ahram:** "I fear that there is no one in the state who is as firm a believer in and defender of press freedom as President Hosni Mubarak, who gave the green light to all who write and criticise. I am almost sure of this after coming across bizarre anti-press trends in the last few days from people whose positions require them to be for press freedom."  
(Ibrahim Nefie, 7 June)

**Al-Arabi:** "Today... journalists get together in celebrate their day and in stress that their loyalty is only to the nation. Their only objective is truth and their war against corruption and terrorism is far from over... Only a decree issued by the country's top political authority will offer a solution — one that is not biased towards the press and journalists but towards the people in their battle for freedom and against corruption and terrorism."  
(Galal Aref, 10 June)

**Al-Ahram:** "The campaign to shackle press freedom and to toughen the penalties against journalists not only muzzles the press and represses journalists but also protects corruption and obstructs democratic development. It is a blow to the most prominent achievement of Mubarak's presidency at a time when the economy is being liberalised — a definite paradox."  
(Salah Hafez, 12 June)

### To every action, a reaction

**Al-Shaab:** "The restricted press freedom in our country is of more benefit to the ruler than the ruled. It is one way to let off steam — a safety valve against explosions... If newspapers are closed down or turned into government organs, respectable journalists and writers will resort to Arab and foreign newspapers to make their living... They will not die. It is the regime that will die; for butchering press freedom would be like committing suicide... cutting the very vessels that carry blood to the heart and the mind."  
(Magdi Hussein, 11 June)

**Al-Ahram:** "We expect the forthcoming Cairo summit to be a first step towards the return of hope, a cry which will awaken those who slumber and a new start for the Arab nation which has been rent asunder by storms and conspiracies."  
(Mustafa Bakri, 9 June)

**Al-Shaab:** "Our triumph in the confrontation with the US-Zionist alliance depends in the first place on our strength... Israel has rearranged its domestic situation in a such a way as to enable it to act even more aggressively and arrogantly in the coming phase. We too must make rearrangements to be able to deter a more fanciful and foolhardy Zionism."  
(Adel Hussein, 7 June)

**Akhbar El-Yom:** "The long era of Arab divisions and squabbles, could have gone on for many years had it not been for what has occurred in Israel... With the peace process threatened by Israel's new rulers, well known for their fanaticism and their hatred of the Arabs and Palestinians, the Arabs are now working to close ranks and support the peace process... Greetings to Bibi Netanyahu whose victory has triggered such a speedy Arab reaction."  
(Ibrahim Saada, 8 June)

**October:** "The recent summits all have messages for Israel and the Arabs... For Israel: the language of force and threats will get you nowhere... For the Arabs: the peace they want will not just come about as a gift or charity. They can only win their rights by overcoming their differences and uniting their positions."  
(Ragab El-Bana, 9 June)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Binyamin Netanyahu's face is a paradox, like a mask that he dons — one that neither smiles nor frowns, that reveals nothing of what he feels within or how he truly feels. He merely looks at you in silent anticipation of your next word or action.

His features are very vague, yet defined — a sharp nose that divides his pained, made-up face into two very different halves, but which leads to precise, cold, hard lips pressed tightly together. The chin is slightly twisted, disquieting but sweeps upward to full, smooth, cheeks. The platinum blond hair and savvy, hasty couture fashion are parts of the costume he wears before taking his place on the political stage.



## Close up

Salama A. Salama

### Undoing the knot

The Egyptian diplomatic initiative of holding a series of Arab mini-summits comprising two or three nations has succeeded in breaking a deadlock which prevented the organisation of a comprehensive Arab summit conference, which was and remains the best mechanism for dealing with problematic developments in the Arab situation. The last such conference was the one held prior to the Gulf War.

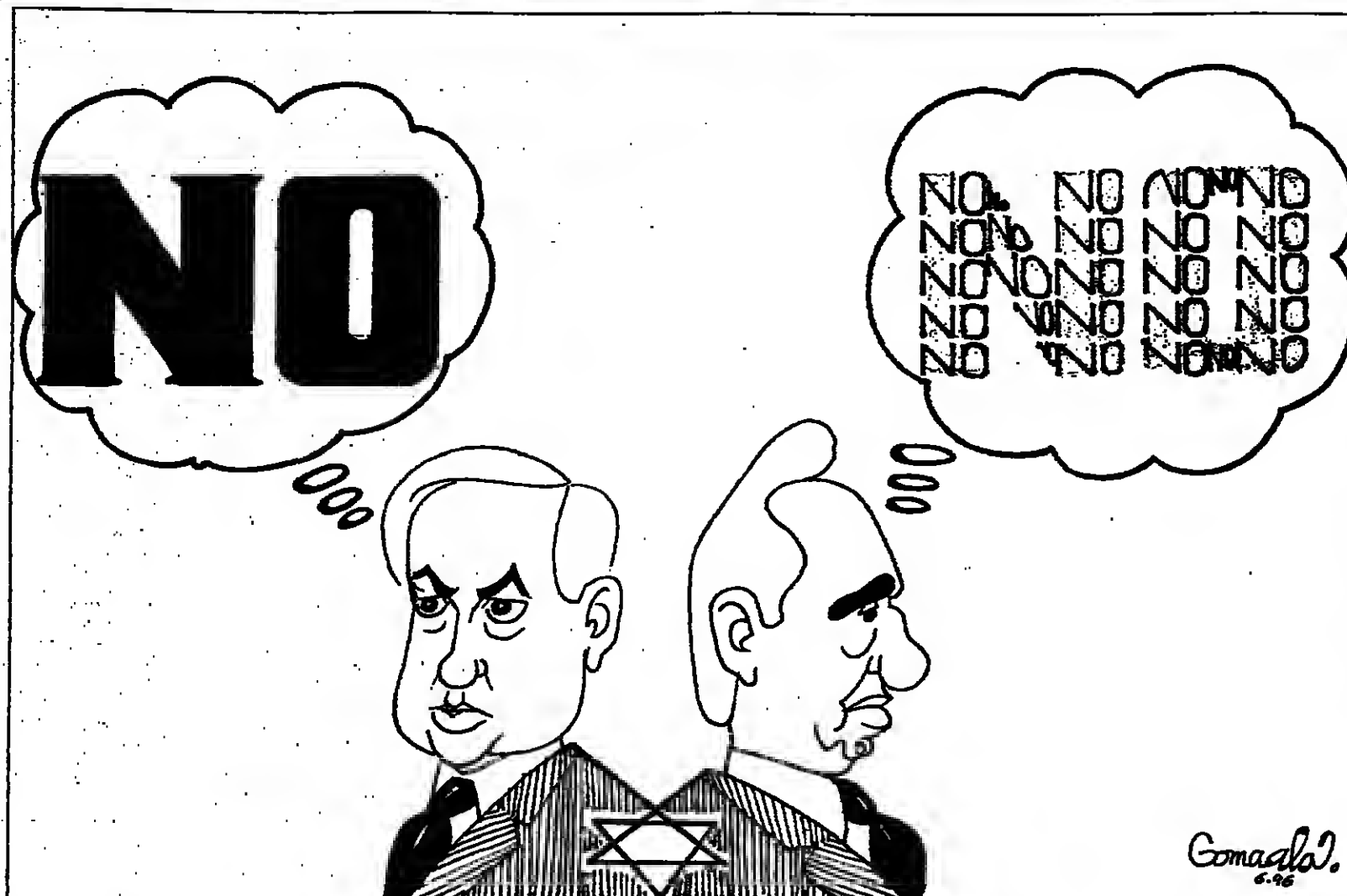
Although the Arab summit which is to take place in Cairo in a week's time will exclude Iraq from attending, it will for the first time be open to any other Arab country wishing to attend. The aim of the summit will be to gather the Arabs in an effort to define the future of peace in the region after the victory of Netanyahu and the Israeli Right. The exclusion of Iraq was the least that could be done to avoid wounding many sensibilities which prevented the convening of a summit for over six years.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that there is an unprecedented experiment involved in convening an Arab summit under the current conditions prevailing in the Arab world and in so far as such a summit constitutes the definitive Arab weapon in confronting the threat to Middle East peace, posed by the positions of Netanyahu and the religious Israeli parties. It is impossible, at this point, to forecast the results. At least the agreement to convene a summit is an indication of the depth of the trauma felt in the Arab capitals at the thought that the oasis of American-Israeli peace in the Middle East in which "they" were "basking" may prove to be merely a mirage.

They must be prepared to revise their calculations and open their eyes to the kind of diplomatic and commercial agreements they were negotiating with Israel. No one should fail to heed the warning note sounded by the communiqué which followed the most recent Damascus tripartite summit, and which warned Israel against any attempt to withdraw from the peace process. The communiqué held the two sponsors of the Madrid Conference and the peace process responsible for rescuing the future of the peace process in case of Israel's reneging on its commitments under that process.

With regard to Israel, two matters must be taken into consideration. The first is Netanyahu's declaration that he would not comment on the convening of an Arab summit until he had formed his new government. This is understandable, since a number of Israeli policies will have to be defined by the forces and parties that will be included in the Likud coalition, particularly the Israeli position on Jerusalem and the withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The second issue is the fact that certain Israeli analysts consider the mere convening of an Arab summit as an act of hostility to Israel, rather than a rejection of the positions expressed by Netanyahu which amount to an Israeli withdrawal from the peace process.

The Arab nations are certainly under no obligation to offer any excuses or justification to Israel for their move to hold a summit to discuss the future of peace. This summit's basic purpose is to examine the options and possible scenarios resulting from the change in Israel's attitude towards the peace process under a Netanyahu-led government. In the final analysis, everything will depend on what Netanyahu and his government decide upon once it is formed, particularly since all contacts between the Arab governments and Netanyahu's representatives so far do not induce much optimism.



## If all the world were apple-pie...

The tradition/modernity debate continues. Amidst development hysteria and technology fetishism, writes Galal Amin, there is little awareness of the fact that science today has much the same status as religion in the Middle Ages

In two very well-written articles, published in two successive issues of *Al-Ahram Weekly* ("Against the Inquisition" and "Deeper Illuminations", 23 and 30 May 1996), Dr Ismail Serageldin made a valuable but one-sided contribution to a very important debate: modernity versus tradition. The first article started very well and promised a balanced discussion of the two sides of the debate. I even sympathised with his description of the current state of the debate about modernity and tradition as "sterile, tired and tiresome", though only in the sense that this debate often contains, as he rightly puts it, "endless repetition, and the marshalling of ever more examples and highly selective anecdotal evidence to buttress the a priori positions".

This, I thought, was quite right, and I was gratified to read his description of himself as "one of those who are proud of their Arab and Muslim identity". This also, turned to be the sum total of his "defence" of "tradition" against the attack of "modernity", and even of his appreciation of the complexity of the issues involved, at least as far as these two articles go. For the rest of the first article and the whole of the second, he presents a position which is "modernity" through and through.

I found this regrettable since I, while of course admiring many of the products of modernity and leading a very modern life (even with respect to products and patterns of behaviour which I utterly abhor, like driving a motor car, simply because I am left with no choice), I think the price we pay for "modernity" is far too high. A writer may be justified in describing the price of modernisation as the inevitable result of the encounter between the West and technologically weaker cultures (although I, for one, still entertain the hope that this miserable pattern of modernisation could be checked or corrected), but I do not think it justifiable that a writer should ignore these heavy sacrifices altogether and discuss "modernity versus tradition" as if we have nothing to lose by continuing to modernise, and as if all we need is to do it faster. This, I am afraid, is Dr Serageldin's implied message, notwithstanding his undoubtedly genuine pride in his Arab and Muslim identity.

All right, the partisans of "tradition" often present us with "tired and tiresome" arguments, with "endless repetition" of "highly selective anecdotal evidence" to buttress their a priori position; but what about the following kind of argument, which appears in Dr Serageldin's second article, being used to buttress the "modernity" position?

"We are confronted with an amazing information explosion. In the United States alone, there are 14,000 magazines published for the general public. Over 55,000 trade books are published annually — that is, one book every 10 minutes, not counting specialised journals and scientific publications. The volume of literature in the Library of Congress doubles every 14 years... "Telecommunications reach the furthest corners of the globe. The volume of traffic on the Internet doubles every 10 minutes..." etc, etc.

These, I admit, are new statistics which I have not encountered before, and which reflect very high speed and rapid acceleration. But I happen to be one of those who do not take speed and acceleration as an unequivocal measure of "advance", as Dr Serageldin obviously does. In what respect are these figures really different from the mass of information with which we have been continuously bombarded for the last 40-50 years, ever since the hysteria of development and economic progress swept over the world? Rates of growth and more rates of growth, per capita income comparisons, how many television sets per head and how many copies of daily newspapers per capita... etc., etc. Does not Dr Serageldin find this also "tired and tiresome"?

I do, and the reason is that all these measures of growth are usually given without the slightest concern for the quality of what is measured, whether it is the quality of the "14,000 magazines published for the general public" in the US, the contents of the new book which will appear 10 minutes from now, or the quality of programmes transmitted by TV, by computers and by other means of communication reaching the furthest corners of the globe.

Dr Serageldin laments the fact that all this is happening in some parts of the world while "we debate the minutiae of jurisprudence, wonder whether a woman's nail polish prevents her from accomplishing complete abstinence, regard novelty with suspicion and attempt to set up barriers wherever our minds may wander". I have many comments to make on this. One is that Dr Serageldin here commits the same error of "marshalling highly selective anecdotal evidence to buttress an a priori position". I wish he would not go on implying that everybody is driven by an a priori position except himself, he alone being ruled exclusively by science and reason. We all have a priori positions, and there is really nothing wrong with this; we all allow our a priori positions to influence our arguments, and there is nothing very bad about that either. What is bad is to be intolerant or contemptuous of other people's a priori positions or to imagine oneself as the only one free of prejudice.

Secondly, not all defenders of tradition spend their

time worrying about the effect of women's nail polish. Some may even deny that women's nail polish has anything at all to do with tradition. Nor are all those who are said to see tradition being ruthlessly trodden upon by modernity necessarily terrorists, fundamentalists or male chauvinists. To put all these in one basket or to imply that these are one and the same is to repeat the vicious message of Western media.

Thirdly, I assure Dr Serageldin that, if he took a careful look at "modern life" — which is supposed to be governed by rational thought — he will find examples of patterns of thinking and behaviour quite similar to worrying about women's nail polish preventing complete abstinence. In fact, so much of what we tend to regard as rational in the "modern" way of life is so regarded only because we take it for granted to such an extent that we never stop to question it. Cases in point are the modern beliefs that "conquering" nature is always a good thing, that you can always turn a wicked person into a better one by putting him in the "right" environment, that equality is always good, that the sooner children become economically independent from their parents the better, that the faster you reach your destination the better, to come closer to women's nail polish, another case in point is the widespread inclination to feel inferior or inadequate if one does not follow the latest fashion in dress, motor car or electronic gadget.

It is not absolutely clear to me that involvement in the "minutiae of jurisprudence" is worse or less productive than much of the "modern" patterns of behaviour which we are amazingly ready to regard as perfectly rational.

To give only one recent example, I would mention the involvement of millions of Americans, for several hours every day, for several months, in following the "minutiae" of the trial of a man called O.J. Simpson, accused of killing his wife and her lover, none of the three being a particularly remarkable person in any way worthy of wasting so much time on. But this is the kind of thing into which the American public (and, increasingly, other modern societies) are continuously being pushed by the modern media. This is not only wasteful and unproductive but positively wicked.

The literature of modern social sciences is also full of pages upon pages of discussion of useless minutiae which rival some of the most famous examples of medieval scholasticism. Barbara Wootton once lamented that economic theoreticians are often preoccupied with questions as utterly unrelated to the real world as the issues raised in the nursery rhyme

"If all the world were apple-pie  
And all the sea were ink,  
And all the trees were bread and cheese  
What should we do for drink?"

Amazingly, however, such modern trivia is forgiven, because it is surrounded by the sacred halo of science. Nor is Dr Serageldin right in thinking that suspicion of novelty is always a bad thing, especially in this age of ours, when novelty is often esteemed just because it is novel. Dr Serageldin himself has not escaped from this fascination with novelty, as he is obviously a strong believer in "progress". He takes it for granted that the twenty-first century will be better than the twentieth, and that it is possible to rank societies, "developed" and "undeveloped", one "above" the other on the basis of per capita income, since all the good things in life are believed to be associated with high per capita income.

There are good reasons, however, to reject this idea of progress and to believe that history is not a one-way movement from the lower to the higher, from the worse to the better. The illusion that "progress" in technology necessarily means "progress" in other things seems to be the reason for this general belief in historical progress. This illusion, in turn, may be based on an exaggerated regard for mechanical or physical power, and on too simplistic a view of the relationship between man's material "advance" and his mental and spiritual development.

J. Bronowski, whom Dr Serageldin quotes admiringly more than once, the author of a book revealingly entitled *The Ascent of Man*, is a perfect example of this widespread but naive belief in the idea of progress, in the perfectibility of man and in the infallibility of science. He never came near contemplating the possibility that science may have become the God of modern man, that it has acquired its own priests, churches, rituals and sacred books and that the "experts" who rule us today in the name of science could be just as dangerous as those who ruled at earlier times in the name of other religions.

Bronowski and like-minded writers are just as intolerant towards those who are suspicious of science and novelty as the religious fundamentalists are towards the secularists. Metaphysical beliefs (of the old-fashioned type) could of course lead people to kill each other, but it is not at all clear that a highly developed "scientific" culture has caused less killing all around the world.

The writer is a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

## To The Editor

### Pity the Pyramids

Sir: I was very disturbed to see the apparent pride with which Al-Ahram associates itself with the recent squash tournament at Giza. Not only do the temporary stands and constructions partially obscure the fantastic view of the Pyramids from a panoramic viewpoint, they also constitute a further degradation of the plateau's status as a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site.

The Pyramids are a beautiful and fantastic achievement, recognised as such by the whole world. Egypt and the Supreme Council for Antiquities run the danger of spoiling that heritage for the rest of us. I, for one, am keen on bringing my family and friends to Giza as quickly as possible, before the whole site is converted into a building site or a theme park.

Al-Ahram, as representatives of Egypt, should think more of the long-term good of the Giza plateau than the short-term value of a squash tournament.

Andrew Smith  
Cairo

### Liberating niqab

Sir: Your front page article regarding the Supreme Court ruling on the veil (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 May) provoked me to respond. I wish herein to address my Muslim brothers Ismail Serageldin and Mohamed Enan. As Serageldin so aptly put it, "we need to create a new discourse — critical, open, and tolerant of different views."

I am tolerant of different interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, but I stop short of accepting inaccurate history. As an American Muslim, I want an equal opportunity to respond. My research has not proven that the niqab is incumbent (as is *hijab*), but it is not "merely an old tradition that has nothing to do with *Shari'a*", as Enan said. The niqab has been worn by many (not all) Muslim women of all ages and classes all over the Islamic world, including Turkey, Iran, Morocco and the Arabian Peninsula as evidenced by historical text and pictorial representation. Could all these women have been brain-washed by or intimidated by men?

I freely chose to wear niqab after 11 years of

believing in Islam. My first five years as a Muslim, I wore long, loose clothing. The second five I added a head scarf, and now the complete "mode" — gloves and all. This transition occurred as a result of increased knowledge of the Arabic language and has nothing to do with pressure from any extremist group or by any male.

Many believe that political and social trends dictate fashion. I propose that we consider the contrary — women's appearance and behaviour could very well strongly influence political development and expression.

Behind every strong man, there is a strong woman. In Islam, and only in Islam, a woman's strength does not come from her pretty face or figure. All strength comes from the Almighty Allah, who has promised to favour his obedient servants. Incidentally, after nine years of living in Egypt, the strongest and smartest women I know wear niqab. Could this be just a coincidence?

If I've piqued the readers' curiosity enough on this subject, I will be happy to provide a follow-up article which will include top scholarship (including Imam Shafie, Ismail Serageldin) and a fair critique of all views by a Ph.D.-level American woman who feels truly liberated in her niqab in Egypt.

Umm Salabehdin  
Maadi  
Cairo

### Don't blame the teachers

Sir: I read with great interest Gamaleddin Saad's letter (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 30 May-5 June) in which he lambasted the education system in our country. First of all, I must agree with the writer that the education system has deteriorated in recent years. However, Mr Saad's assertion that "the teachers... spend most of their teaching time trying to get their pupils to have extra lessons with them" is much exaggerated.

The fact is that the majority of teachers are working to the best of their ability to benefit their students at school, in spite of the very difficult conditions under which they work. To say that they are all bad is a distortion of reality and an unacceptable generalisation.

The factors contributing to the lamentable status quo of our education system are many and varied. Among these are the defective curricula, the large number of students per class, the old-fashioned methods of teaching (which are usually imposed on teachers by the supervisors), the lack of facilities and teaching aids, the absence of creativity, cancelling the sixth grade in the primary stage, the missing link between parents and schools, the defective system of testing and evaluation, the ineffective and fruitless teacher training programmes, the faulty system of supervision, and — contrary to all expectations — the new system of *Thanawiya Amma*.

If we are really serious about bringing an end to the rot in our education system, let's not put all the blame on the POOR TEACHERS! Essam Hanna Wahba  
Salama Language School  
Assiut

### The cart before the horse

Sir: Teachers are regarded as an indispensable component and the nerve centre of the educational process in European countries and much of the rest of the world.

We cannot deny, as teachers, the eminent role played by the Minister of Education Hussein Kamal Baha'eddin, to promote development of the educational process and to improve the material conditions of teachers.

The new programme implemented by the state to improve teachers' living standards is certainly one of the basic requirements for Egypt to be able to face the challenges of the coming century. However, this is not enough. I call upon the minister of education to take more progressive strides towards raising teachers' pay, in order to abolish the phenomenon of private lessons.

It isn't logical to impose restrictions preventing teachers from giving private lessons, which is due to socio-economic factors. Given their harsh financial circumstances, how would they support themselves otherwise? Ashraf Fargallah Saad  
English language teacher  
Beni Suef

## Soapbox

### Time for parliament

Egypt was the first nation in both Africa and Asia to espouse a parliamentary system. In 1866, during the reign of Khedive Ismail, the first parliamentary elections in the country took place. Earlier, soon after the accession of Khedive Said in 1856, a charter known as the "Said Charter" was issued which gave Egyptians, for the first time in modern history, the right to possess agricultural land among other key human rights. The changes coincided with the emergence of a flourishing class of indigenous traders and industrialists.

After the creation of the first parliamentary assembly, known as the Chamber of Deputies, other assemblies came to be such as the State Council, the General Assembly, and the Legislative Assembly of 1913. With the issuance of the 1923 Constitution, Egypt had its first modern parliament inaugurated on 15 March 1924. Next came the parliamentary elections of 1925, 1926, 1930, 1936, 1938 and 1942. Apart from the 1938 election, all the others resulted in overwhelming majorities for the Wafd. Apart from the 31 March 1938 elections, all the Egyptian elections were conducted in a fair and impartial manner.

During this parliamentary period of Egypt's history, three universities were created: Cairo University (1926) Alexandria University (1942) and Ain Shams University (1950). Free education was decreed, the corvée was abolished, a free market system created. The fiscal laws on income and profits were decreed.

Unfortunately, 1950 witnessed the last free and fair parliamentary elections in Egypt. The parliamentary system is deeply rooted in our country. Egyptians have proven that they are quite capable of running a sound parliamentary democratic system. It is time that they got it.

This week's soapbox speaker is the secretary-general of the Wafd Party.



Saad Fakhri Abdelnour

## The 0.7 per cent

By Salah Montasser

Had Netanyahu beat Peres by 29 votes and not 29,000, he would still have become prime minister. The first direct election of the Israeli prime minister, independently of party lists, brought 50.3 per cent of the electorate to the polls for Netanyahu and 49.6 for Peres. One per cent dropped blank ballots into the boxes. This is a true democracy — one in which a candidate with a fractional advantage wins to the same extent as one elected by the vast majority.

Analysts and researchers have been especially interested in carefully examining vote distribution in an attempt to understand the marginal difference which brought Netanyahu to power. The first important indication revealed by this examination is undoubtedly the impact of the Arab vote, especially on the direct election of the prime minister.

In my opinion, the weight of Arab votes in any direct elections will always be a source of great disturbance for Israelis, particularly in the future, because those votes may well be decisive in choosing the head of state, irrespective of the tendencies of Jewish voters.

We can visualise what could have happened had the 20,000 Arabs who voted for Netanyahu and the 12,000 who placed empty ballots in the election boxes voted in favour of Peres. The practical result would have been Peres's undisputed victory. Had the Arab vote not been taken into account, about 58 per cent of Israelis voted for Netanyahu; this difference diminished, almost to vanishing point, when Arab votes were included.

The Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, and the Qana massacre in particular, divided the Arab vote; Netanyahu reaped the fruits of Peres's savagery, in spite of the pressure on the Arabs to vote for Peres.

Undoubtedly, the results of the elections revealed to those Arabs who have the right to vote in Israel (estimated at 541,000, a number which is expected to increase by the next elections to more than 600,000) the extent of their influence, if they are able to vote as a bloc. This state of affairs is profoundly disturbing to Israel.

The second important indication revealed by the examination of vote distribution is the weight of the military establishment in the elections. The Likud firmly believed that the military would vote overwhelmingly for Netanyahu — so firmly, indeed, that they began to celebrate his victory before the final tally was complete. It came as something of a surprise that the military vote was evenly distributed between Peres and Netanyahu — a new phenomenon in Israeli society.

That the military, traditionally a Likud stronghold, moved toward Labour in these elections implies that a growing proportion of the military establishment chose the candidate who expressed a desire for peace over the proponent of violence. This is a significant phenomenon, and one to which researchers should pay closer attention in future analyses.



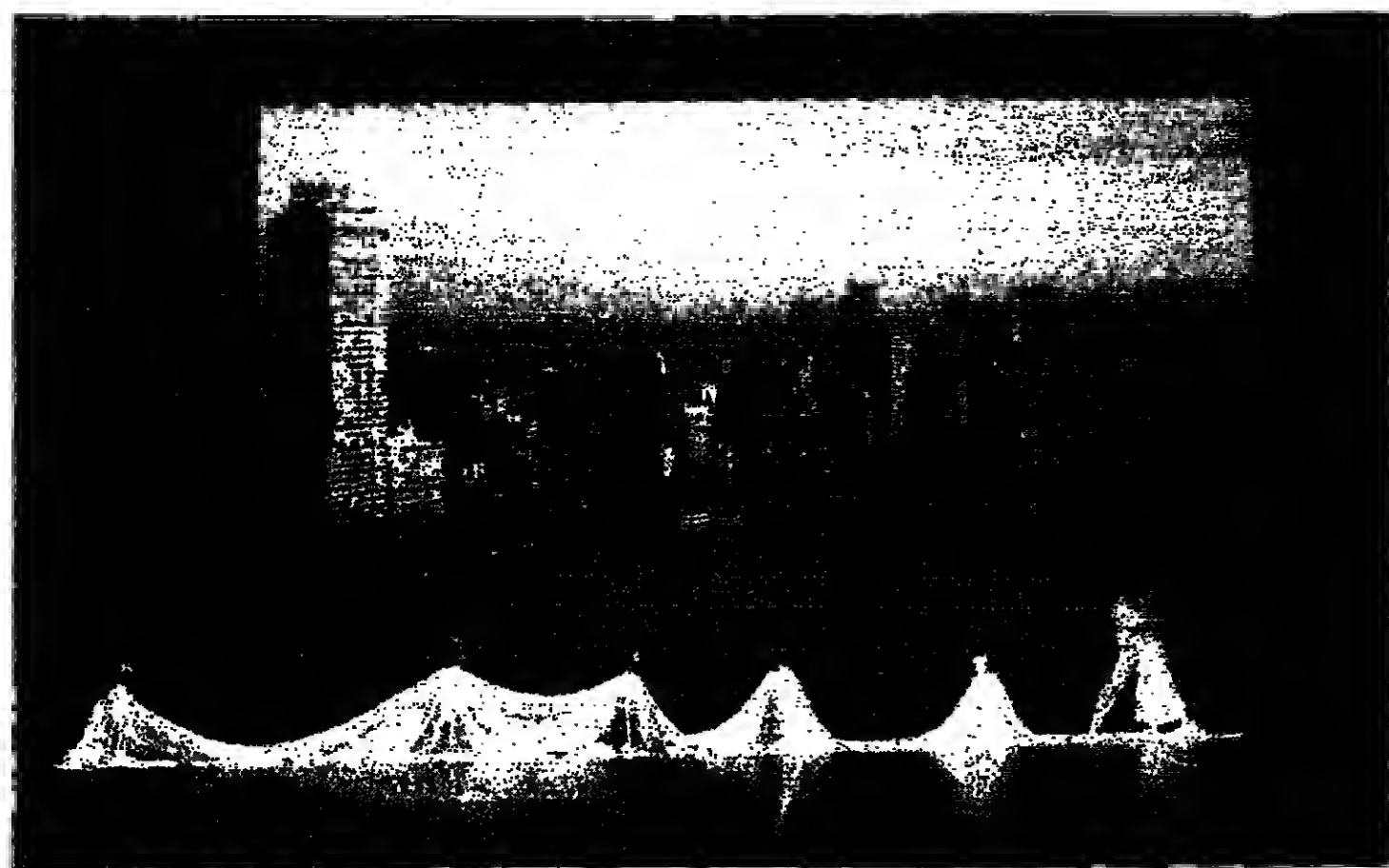


Photo: Sherif Sonbol

## Loving and coping

David Blake and the Ahmeds learn to cope with a beautiful Juggernaut against backdrops of light

Does anyone who lives in it look at Cairo? If so, how do they see it? Wide circle of options, stock shots from in or above the Nile, a cityscape street perspective — from far out in the smog, heading for Europa or a mindscape. Better ignore the whole thing and stick to history.

Or let Sherif Sonbol give you his version in photographs. Kisses or curses, it is all the same to Cairo who will be indifferent to both. Your feelings don't matter — love it or leave it. It is the least wearing approach.

This ballet, *El-Nile*, has been performed before some years ago when the new Opera first opened with its creator Abdel-Moneim Kamel in the important male lead and Erminia Kamel as his wife.

This is not a review, but a look at a phenomenon called *El-Nile*. It begins basically from the boy's point of view: "You out there — I'm a man and you're a woman. Let's coalesce." And they do so in dance forms of great beauty aided and abetted by a tall symbolic bird of Materialism in gold Superman tights. They marry. They have children — five on the line pronto from out

behind a waving golden curtain. Everyone looks beautiful.

A Cairo situation known to millions develops, unbelievable, unanswerable. The riddle of a twisty situation is about to unfold. Like so many others — what with the kids and the work and the unending grind of the washing machine — she finds her man expensive. She washes out the street mud, iron out the creases, clothes, clothes, clothes, and keeps up with the Ahmeds next door. Explosion coming. He goes job-hunting and she is left alone to do the protective lioness bit with the children.

Here comes a triumphant swoop into action of the Golden Bird of Materialism. As a couple, they are cracking apart because the Bird has other ideas for man and wife. Cabarens on wide boulevards, not called Sunset, loom. For the man's life it is hard, too. He sweeps the streets while at home the Golden Bird makes a try-on with the wife. Harassment does not suit her. She's legit. He soon sinks into total unemployment then into the totally unwelcome. They face each other. Explosion. He walks out. Dark nights for these two souls.

The stage sinks into blackness except for a long triangular beam of clear light. The wife is wrapped in a filmy cloud of material like a jewel-spangled shroud.

The music up to now has always been listenable, avoiding the Cartesian straight lines and sudden humps of Egyptian music. It broadens softly into long waving polyphonic melodies with echoes of minutely exact microscopic percussions in the distance, which lifts the ballet far up onto a new plane it has not reached before. The wife sinks to her knees, turning her back on the audience, alone in the blackness. She looks out across the abyss of a void to the future, hers or her family's. The movement of the dance has stopped, and an uninvited peace steals over the legend.

There before her rises Cairo, old dead-eyed Dick, Father-Mother of everyone.

This could be corn, but it is not. There is Cairo, bathing in its celebrated immortal amber and orange afterglow, a same knockout for all. Because of the fusion of Sonbol's magically magnified picture of downtown Cairo and Omar Khairat's innovative timeless fresh mu-

sic the ballet ends on an uplift. The Ahmeds come together, the young family males strut, the girls swirl elegantly to the rhythm of sunlight, not dead-light, and the ballet ends as they face the megalopolis with swagger and courage.

The ballet is a brave shot into difficult seldom-visited territory for the Cairo Opera Ballet Company, here and now on scene realism. Old words don't do. The ballet somehow manages to suggest this, warm and affecting, tender sometimes as it faces the iron butterfly of Cairo which legend says has a heart of gold. Cairo is the hero of the ballet — so beware of beautiful Juggernaut.

Khairat's music says it all. Hard to place it — opera or pop. Whatever it is, it is right for the scene and the characters on stage, and it belongs to dancing. Erminia Kamel was the woman, Sergei Bolonsky the man. The tall Golden Bird was Gorbachev, The Cairo Opera Orchestra seemed happy under Taha Nagui.

But as the curtains slid to a close, it was Sonbol's golden towers, threatening and avuncular, which caught the breath.

### Music

**Gamal Abdel-Rahim:** Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Cairo Opera Choir; Aldo Magnato, choir master; Nicolai Dilgov, oboe soloist; Rada El-Wakil, soloist bass baritone; Youssef El-Sisi, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 31 May

Very beautiful sound waves floated up from the Cairo Symphony Orchestra at the beginning of this concert devoted to Abdel-Rahim's music — with the piece called *Badali*.

We are told that his German connections plus his inborn feeling for the modes of his Egyptian musical background are welded together to produce a type of music very special to himself. A vision, an emanation, an Abdel-Rahim sound, Oriental and of the other world, Euro-classic. Nothing retro but forward looking.

Does this longed for fusion ever materialise? There are plenty of statements from his oeuvre, but no answers. Are you supposed to be anywhere in particular in his music? Is it abstract pure music? This seems to be his idea — but even Bach suggests place. In Abdel-Rahim's music there is a sense of not belonging anywhere at all, not in Europe — or in Egypt, a land of blue space, Nile and desert.

An Egyptian, Abdel-Rahim has every right to avail himself of the raw material of the country for his music. *Badali* suggested not rural Egypt, but a threatening dark night scene out of Alban Berg's *Lulu*.

The *Lotus Pond* for Oboe and Orchestra had both exciting shadows and longer, but there was no water in the pond. We might have had a little Debussy, Ravel or Strauss. This pond was maybe formally water, but as music it emerged austere and dry. But the quasi-melodic mistiness passing across the landscape had power to disorient. Where were we? The charmingly written sululations of the oboe, beautiful though they were, made no effort to explain anything.

Gamal Abdel-Rahim's ballet suite *Hassan and Naima* — a bucolic tragedy about a pair of star-crossed lovers — as music is good, but it is ballet music. Hassan and Naima pass through their tragedy of injustice and outrage without much surface disturbance from the music. Abdel-Rahim seems better at surface effects than at timbre or tone. He froths out his or-



## Demonic decibels

David Blake picks his way through chill and fire

Hall, Cairo Opera House, 7 June

It's musical earthquake time in the West. The Devil's cryptic admonition to Faust in the Goethe version as he anoints him with the doubtful blessing of eternal youth "sustain yourself, sustain yourself" applies to listeners at what used to be called concerts of contemporary music. Abdel-Rahim's strange chilly music fits this categorisation. So did the music of the 7 June concert splendidly presented by the Pro Helvetia Arts Council of Switzerland: brave choice of repertoire, feelingly played by the Cairo Symphony and conducted by Jurg Wyttenbach, most fast moving of Switzerland's musicians, pianist, composer, conductor and lecturer.

Wyttenbach left the piano in this concert to others, but conducted the orchestra in the opening piece, El-Saedi's *Miniatures for orchestra*. These short epigrams are full of asides and allusions on the orchestral scene but never descend into plagiarism. They speed along like a fast car. El-Saedi's virtues as a conductor spring into action in his compositions. It says a lot for Wyttenbach that he brought to their performance the same qualities as those of their creator. Tension, speed, ever-changing tempi darting about off the reel in burst of nervous reaction.

The *Miniatures* seem to be divided into four but never actually pause — they burgeon out and upwards into all kinds of designs. This is used with virtuoso compositional effect by the composer who has a unique sense of design as a conductor. The music is busy and fascinates by its

chestral effects with great ingenuity, screens of lovely noises come and go over the surface, but the emotion remains the same — a mystery.

The final work of the evening, *The Awakening (Al-Sahwa)* is a long 1965 work to a poem by Salah Abdel-Sabbour. It tells of loss, presumably the narrator's. The baritone's "beloved" and his supportive brother died. Though in this work there is no effort to glamorise a return to a simple village life, there is in the tale a mother who brings comfort, sustaining the narrator with a belief in the joys of everlasting life. The baritone part was well sung by Rada El-Wakil, but with his usual dark idyl depths. Much missed, these might have given this music a sharper edge.

The Cairo Opera Choir and Symphony Orchestra under El-Sisi did a very impressive job with all the music of the evening. All the levels of tone in *The Awakening* were given full expression. El-Sisi is never one to prettify or soften a phrase. We had force and power from choir, soloist and interpretation. El-Sisi left the smokescreen in place, but there were suggestions of things only hinted at in the music. Whatever personality there was to Abdel-Rahim's music El-Sisi gave, shimmers and all.

**Cairo Symphony Orchestra:** *Masters of the 20th Century (4): Ahmed El-Saedi, Miniatures for orchestra; Carl Nielsen, Concerto for clarinet and orchestra, clarinet soloist; Mohamed Homdy; Giacinto Scelsi, Quattro pezzi; Jurg Wyttenbach, De Metall; baritone: Kurt Widmer; Jurg Wyttenbach, conductor; Main*

auditorium, Cairo Opera House, 7 June

courageous clarity. There is not a moment's hesitation to these springing wheels without rest. Like all music which moves the emotions, it is visual, reveals in colour and is never flaccid. The total construction matches the visual. If there is rest, and there is, it is a sudden halt to the infernal Faustian machine.

Carl Nielsen's music lay uncomprehendingly in this concert — another weave, another dimension. Nielsen, though aware of all his era's dimensions, kept within bounds. Nielsen's music suggests familiar territory, not like those which El-Saedi explores, but predictable and slower. The *Concerto for clarinet and orchestra* needs a strong virtuoso player, and in Mohamed Homdy it had one. He was inexhaustible, breath to spare for long notes ending in *coloratura* twists, with easy confidence like a jazz player.

In the second movement the musical invention wavers a bit and we are in for that form of strain when a composer knowingly moves into dangerous unfamiliar territory. But Nielsen knows his way. He withdraws from the situation which later music of the century confronts and positively revels in. Nielsen turns the sound to a positively blues tune, comes across Ellington and we are in blues territory when the clarinet doing those vibrato waves so expressive in the jazz era.

The last of the three movements. The solo instrument rises high and gradually fades away into nothingness. Nielsen, aided by Homdy, was very beautiful.

We then enjoyed a short sharp series of sentences from Jurg

Wyttenbach on the next composer to be played, one of his favorites, Giacinto Scelsi, a composer who died at an active 80 plus. As Wyttenbach warned, throw out the lot when you listen to Scelsi. No tune, not much rhythm, no place suggested, no tempo — just music. John Cage, the American, said there is no such thing as sheer noise. Traffic snarl-ups, Beethoven — it is all art. So with Scelsi. His music, Wyttenbach says, is like human skin: it never ends, it covers everything, it is always there, the same tough almost immortal fabric. But it can stretch — as did the *Quattro pezzi*. The four pieces are delightful, naive and free. They keep far from the classic band wagon, stay far out where the air is clear, are restful like a mobair blanket, comforting and light like the prose of Raymond Roussel whom Scelsi resembles. A big climax of exciting whistles. Harmony and memory get lost. Think about God.

And the last piece is by Jurg Wyttenbach himself — his *De Metall*, a famous piece set to words from the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. "Through man's fault the natural forces he set free but does not control will destroy the world". Wyttenbach's jaunty reading of Leonardo's infernal cookbook of horrors was perfect. He deep silenced the big, distinguished audience totally and the *De Metall* began.

It is a hit to the head. No ducking the blows. The music is varied and rugged — dark. The powers of darkness reflect only something else's light. This is monkey-land lighting, and not the sun as *homo sapiens* sees it. The composition avoids all the pitfalls of apocalyptic music. It is brisk, listenable and horrible. It is also horrible for the bass baritone to sing. Kurt Widmer, therefore, deserves deep respect and thanks for his handling of the murderous intervals and sudden descents into grunt and cackle. He was a wonder. He even rose above the orchestra when in rare moments it let out its premium force.

*De Metall* is a macabre masterpiece of how to state the absolute with the minimum. The message lay there like the morally wounded planet on which we live for all to see. As Leonardo and Wyttenbach see it, "Repent ye" is quite out of place.

### EXHIBITIONS

**Fatih Hassan (Paintings)**  
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel. 578 4494. Daily exc. Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 13 June.

**Ingrid Geler (Paintings)**  
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Ghundi St. Bab El-Louk. Tel. 393 1764. Daily exc. Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 13 June.

**Javier Olaso, Luis Del Castillo, Veronica Baeza & Martin Recondo El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel. 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 15 June. Paintings and graphic works.**

**The Journalism and Mass Communication Darkroom Workshop**  
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel. 537 3422. Daily exc. Fri & Sat, 9am-noon & 6pm-9pm. Until 14 June. Photographs by students of AUC's JMC Department.

**Miniatures**  
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifien St. Downtown. Tel. 393 689. Daily exc. Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 18 June. Including works by Abdel-Radi El-Gazzar and Adham Wazly and several contemporary artists.

**Student Exhibition**  
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St. Ismailia Sq. Heliopolis. Tel. 417 4824/417 4825. Daily exc. Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 3pm-6pm. Until 19 June. Hoda El-Ghaly's students, who have worked at the centre's atelier during 1995/96, exhibit their paintings.

**Ceramics Biennale**  
Arte Centre, 1 El-Mashad El-Savari St. Zamelak. Tel. 340 8211. Daily exc. Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 20 June.

**Youssef Mamlek (Paintings)**  
Foundation for Helvetic Culture, 18 Sidi Mawalli St. near El-Astair, Alexandria. Tel. 482 1598. Until 20 June.

**Group Exhibition (Paintings)**  
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Ghundi St. Bab El-Louk. Tel. 393 1764. Daily exc. Sun 12pm-8pm. Until 27 June. The students of the Cairo Academy, Faculty of Fine Arts, exhibit their work under the title "Old Cairo".

**Barbara Graf & Sadiya Nadeem**  
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel. 578 4494. Daily exc. Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 4 July.

**The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud**  
23 Enayedaddin St. Downtown. Tel. 934 284. Daily 10am-6pm. Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet and Rodin.

**Egyptian Museum**  
Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel. 573 4319. Daily exc. Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm. Outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

**Coptic Museum**  
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel. 362 8766. Daily exc. Fri, 9am-6pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm. Founded in 1910, the museum houses the largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

**Islamic Museum**  
Fort Said St. Ahmed Maher St. Bab El-Khalil. Tel. 390 9930/390 1320. Daily exc. Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm. A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including mashrabiya, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

**Museum of Modern Egyptian Art**  
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel. 340 6861. Daily exc. Mon, 10am-1pm & 3pm-9pm. A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

**Mohamed Nagui Museum**  
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mahmoud El-Ghundi St. Gezira. A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

**Mahmoud Makhar Museum**  
Tahrir St. Gezira. Daily exc. Sun 10am-6pm, 9am-11.30pm. A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Makhar (d. 1924), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands

### Listings

near Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

#### FILMS

**Percy Adieu Films**  
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St. Downtown. Tel. 573 9877.

**Last Five Days (1982):** 13 June, 7pm.  
**Celeste (1981):** 19 June, 7pm.

**Italian Films**  
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St. Zamelak. Tel. 340 8791.  
**Le Vie Del Signore Sono Finite (1987),** starring Massimo Troisi and M. Bonetti. 16 June, 7pm.  
**La Viaggia Con Papa (1982),** directed by, and starring, Alberto Sordi. 18 June, 7pm.

**French Films**  
French Cultural Centre, Maadras El-Hogouy El-Ferensiyu St. Mounira. Tel. 354 7679.  
**A Century of Writers,** documentary film featuring Naguib Mahfouz' works. Directed by Anne Laine. 17 June, 7pm.  
**French Caneen (1954),** directed by Jean Renoir and starring M. Felix. 18 June, 7pm.

**French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St. Ismailia Sq. Heliopolis. Tel. 417 4824/417 4825.**  
**Je Suis Le Seigneur Du Chateau (1989),** directed by R. Vazquez, starring J. Rochefort. 13 June, 7pm.  
**Touche Pas Au Grisbi (1953),** directed by J. Becker and starring J. Gabin. 18 June, 7pm.

**The Village**  
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St. Garden City. 13 June, 6pm.  
Directed by Yoji Yamada (1975). Takashi is the leader of the youth association in the Matsuo village where, for the first time, a musical performance is to be held. He works hard to ensure the performance's success.

**Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.**

**Ya Deala... Ya Gharani (My Life... My Passion)**  
Rheal I. 26 July St. Downtown. Tel. 573 305. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Roxy, Roxy** Sq. Heliopolis. Tel. 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Tiba I. Nasr City.** Tel. 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

**Magdi Ahmed Ali's** debut film explores the intimate lives of three women played by Laila Elwi, Elham Shafine and Hala Sedqi.

**El-Lansang (The Warden)**  
Kala, 23 Enayedaddin St. Downtown. Tel. 934 284. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. With Fifi Abdou and El-Sharif Mahrour.

**Violin and Cello Recital**  
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 June, 9pm.

**Rhythm and Melody**  
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel. 340 6861. 19 June, 8.30pm. Conducted by Yasser Mohamed (q), with Abdulla El-Kard (Oudou), Na'ela Taji (Piano), Magdi Mahmoud and Nagui Abdel-Latif (Dof).

#### THEATRE

**Knock**  
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St. Ismailia Sq. Heliopolis. Tel. 417 4824. 16 June, 8pm.  
Julia Roman's play will be performed by the Heliopolis amateur theatre troupe.

**El-Amira Tawazir (The Princess Awazir)**  
Zaki Tolaymat Hall, El-Taji Theatre, Ataba. Tel. 937 948. Daily exc. Tues, 9.30pm.

**El-Sot Hoda (Lady Hoda)**  
Nasr City, Ataba Sq. Tel. 911 267. Daily exc. Tues, 9.30pm.

#### LECTURE

**Children And Accidents**  
French Cultural Centre, Maadras El-Hogouy El-Ferensiyu St. Mounira. Tel. 354 7679. 13 June, 6.30pm.  
Lecture by Anne Turz.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Cairo. Tel. 5786064. Fax 5786089/533.

Compiled by Inji El-Kashaf

### Around the galleries

**SURREALISM** features strongly in the paintings by Ghada Abu Ghazala currently on exhibit at Salama Gallery. The 40 paintings on show vary in subject matter from colourful interior, psychological spaces to explorations of the horrors of war.

The Verdi room of the Marriott Hotel was given over to paintings by Neven Gaidi. A student of Sabri Ragheb, Gaidi's still-lives and portraits

are technically accomplished examples of what may be called the Egyptian impressionist style. The Opera House Gallery plays host to 60 black and white photographs by Reem El-Faisal. Taking as their subject the port of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, these powerfully capture the ebb and flow, the push and pull of human and maritime traffic.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ahadi



# Gender in history

In her autobiography (*Rihla Jabal al-Jabal, Rihla Sa'ba* [Mountainous Journey, Difficult Journey], Dar Al-Aswar, Acre, 1985) the Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan (1917-1991) tells us that her father, a political activist who was sent to prison and to exile, wanted her to write poetry similar to that of her brother Ibrahim who had died and whose poems of the 1930s and '40s voiced the collective experience of the Palestinian people struggling for national liberation. She was unable to fulfil her father's wish. She felt guilty, enraged and helpless, not only because she loved Ibrahim, but also because she understood how relevant for a Palestinian poet the task of articulating the conscience of his/her people. Tuqan, however, could only write lyrical poems as the world at large had been forbidden land to her and the only thing she knew were her own personal emotions.

Half a century later, Arab women are involved in a complex social reality which they try to conceptualise; unlike that of Tuqan, their experience is not one of seclusion but of immersion and saturation. The pressures of patriarchy are still there, though less fierce than those of earlier times. More insistent are the pressures of a post-colonial national reality. The violation of one's right to choose, at the core of the issue of women's rights, extends to the overwhelming majority of men and women in countries the destiny of which is determined by interests other than their own. In such a context, a myopic emphasis on gender problems is as absurd as the feminist talk of angry women in the back seats of a hijacked plane. The female experience becomes one of the many details of the larger national context of exploitation and oppression, a context which for writers includes such repressive measures as suspension from jobs, denial of access to the media and even imprisonment.

In *The Limits of Freedom of Speech* (Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, 1993), Marina Singh compiles a bibliography of 40 Egyptian writers who were detained or imprisoned from 1952 to 1981. These writers have produced a substantial body of prison memoirs. Among the women who have contributed to this body are Latifa Al-Zayat, Farida Al-Nagash, Nawal Al-Saadawi and Safwan Kazam. Irrespective of their political differences — Al-Zayat and Al-Nagash are Marxist, Saadawi is a liberal feminist and Kazam is an Islamist — these anti-establishment women writers have experienced political detention and life in prison.

The prison, however, in Latifa Al-Zayat's autobiography, *An Inspection Campaign* (*Hamlet Taftish*), Dar al-Hilal, 1994, takes on a new, powerful meaning. She writes: "The officer is taking me to prison but I know that nobody can really put me in prison. My liberty was there, at the end of the road, complete, waiting for me to stretch my arms to embrace it" (pg. 116). Paradoxically, the actual prison at Al-Quanater in 1981 implies the fall of the prison within, the mind-forged manacles of selfishness, fear and submission.

In her writing, Al-Zayat's articulation of woman's thwarted potential is far from simple. Her women characters are never simplistically presented as innocent victims of patriarchal society or political tyranny. The issue of human rights is not seen in manichean terms of oppressor and oppressed, but rather, Al-Zayat suggests, the quest for liberation implies self-scrutiny, self-judgment and an awareness of human worth and responsibility.

Since the pressures of political power in Arab countries are shared by men and women, discussions of the experience of oppression solely in terms of gender miss the point. An Arab writer, whether man or woman, will be relatively safe if she conforms to the status quo and will be persecuted if she attempts to oppose or subvert it.

Within the context of stifled aspirations, of authoritarianism and the post-colonial moment, questions of history become more urgent than those of gender. The writers of my generation, I once wrote, are "conscious that history is not only out there in books and records of the past, but is a living experience of everyday life: great wars, great expectations, heavy losses, innumerable defeats, traumatic changes, fractures and disjunctures and the constant insecurity of a human will negated and of subjects acted upon rather than acting. Our present is lived as history; an

Women from the Islamic world met in a conference in Washington, organised by the Sisterhood is Global Institute. Radwa Ashour participated



Om Ratiba, Gazbia Sirry, 1952 and Tourists Ascending the Great Pyramid (Illustrated London News, 7 May 1887)

oppressive and haunting historical reality with which we grapple and which we labour to grasp" ("A space of my own", *Al-Ahram Weekly* (23-29 Nov. 1995). The experience is not peculiar to women; most writers born in the 1940s, or in the years which just preceded or followed, share a common structure of feeling. Their literary production puts into question the assumption of sex differ-

ence. The experience of social power and subordination overshadows the rigid model of opposition between masculinity and femininity.

History is an overwhelming presence which haunts present day Arab writers, pervades their texts, hovers like a silent shadow on its margins. The writers' obsession with recording and historicising their experience is a means to

conceptualise their existence. This, in turn, implies an overall revision of previous assumptions. Writing of the Lebanese civil war, the Lebanese novelist Hoda Barakat says: "(it) taught me to recheck everything I had learned, from the history of my country and that of the area to the memories of my grandfather, my father and that of the village." The war, says Barakat, put everything, including human nature, into question: "It was in Beirut that I found myself on that night of heavy bombardment, jumping to the stairs to escape, jumping over my child and all that I had learned about the noble instincts of motherhood. It was also there that I realised, when soldiers stopped me at a checkpoint, that I could, if I had the power and a gun, kill whoever humiliates me deliberately. I discovered that I could do it with rapture and a voracity which I had previously considered sick..." ("Writing Off Time" [*Al-Kimba Kharij Al-Zaman*], The First Arab Women Bookfair, Cairo, Nov. 1995). The war experience was like an infernal mirror whose reflections, once perceived, could never be dismissed.

As in the case of Barakat, a considerable number of Arab women writers — Ahlam Mustaghanmi (Algeria), Zahra Usar (Jordan) and myself (Egypt), to name but three — are engaged in the attempt to appropriate history and to produce alternative ways of perception. Mustaghanmi, for example, in *The Body's Memory* (*Al-Jasad Al-Jawid*), Dar Al-Adab, Beirut, 1993, rewrites the history of the Algerian revolution through the love story of a married war veteran. In her narrative, she produces a subversive version of the last four decades of Algerian history, one which exposes and opposes the official version.

In *Departure from Susruga* (*Al-Khury Min Susruga*), Dar Azmina, Amman, 1992, Umar reconstructs the exodus of the Caucasians from their original homeland. The fate of the community is recreated, subverting the image, used by the Jordanian monarchy and the British, of the small minority group.

In my *Granada Trilogy: Granada, Mariama and Exodus* (*Gharnata, Mariama Wal Rahil*), Dar al-Hilal, Cairo, 1994-1995) the history of the Moriscos of Spain is reconstructed. The theme of Al-Andalus which has been treated by Arab writers in countless poems, novels and plays and which emphasised the glory of the past and/or the lost paradise is subverted into a narrative of collective marginalisation, coercion and resistance to the Inquisition and Catholic hegemony.

In Barakat's *Stone of Laughter* (*Hajar al-Dahiq*), Dar Riad Najib al-Rayess, London, 1990 and *Love People* (*Ahl al-Hawa*), Dar al-Nahar, Beirut, 1993, war is de-familiarised through the pervasive sensibility of a narrator who sees differently and makes us question our settled assumptions. In the first novel, Barakat rewrites the history of the civil war through the consciousness of a jobless young man who experiences the details of the war without getting involved while in the second novel she recreates the experience of war through the consciousness of a mentally disturbed person.

The quest in the above mentioned novels goes beyond the issue of women's rights. In these novels, the writer's obsession with history inextricably links the fate of woman to the fate of the community, thus producing narratives of emancipation which encompass the mutations of the individual and collective.

Alert, critical and forceful, Arab women writers assume their social role reappropriating, through their writings, both threatened geography and threatening history. Their effort to shape alternative forms of consciousness constitutes a challenge to the dominant discourse and opens new horizons of expectation. I once wrote, "writing is a retrieval of a human will negated. I write, the space becomes my own, and I am no longer an object acted upon by history but a subject acting in history." ("A Space of my Own").

*Abridged version of the second part of an unpublished paper entitled: Creativity and Liberation: The Case of Arab Women Writers, presented by Professor Radwa Ashour at the Beijing and Beyond conference, held at George Washington University, Washington DC, 11-12 May 1996.*

## All That Beautiful Voice That Comes From Within

By Salwa Bakr

Everything appeared normal, in accordance with the usual daily rituals. The rooms in order and clean, the plates upon the table waiting to be eaten from, while the faint sound of the radio chattered the usual afternoon news, but Abdel-Hamid felt that some worry was weighing down upon his wife [...]. He asked:

"What's the matter, Sayeda?"

"Nothing."

[...] She mumbled shyly that she wanted to talk to him about something, but felt embarrassed.

"Yes?" he asked, then lit a cigarette, taking a guess at the news. Of course she'll ask for money, and use some urgent matter as an excuse, or try to convince him of raising the monthly allowance. There are no other private matters that Sayeda would be embarrassed of asking him about... He will not pay a single *mileem* more than what he already pays for the house every month... He slipped his strong tea and said with clenched teeth: "Speak."

From abyssal depths, Sayeda tried to push her courage up to her tongue and articulate what she wants to say, but courage had quickly slipped to the deep again and a weak, quivering voice came out: "You see, the matter is that I have discovered I am..."

"Pregnant?"

The husband stood screaming, like someone who had just found himself (pardon my language), sitting upon an imploding stake, and the words "Is this possible" came out in a spray of spittle caused by agitation.

"Is it possible, Sayeda, that you could be pregnant again? All right then, I swear by my mother's grave that I will turn your day into night, if it turns out to be true, because I am sick of children and their burden. I have no money for delivery expenses, or even for an abortion. Suit yourself accordingly, clever one."

[...] Should he beat her? Throw her down to the ground and kick her till she bleeds and lets out what is in her insides, or open the window wide and fling her outside? Had it not been for the cigarette which almost burnt his fingers — so that he went to bury its stub in the ashtray — Sayeda would have probably not plucked her courage and said "Forget about pregnancy and that nonsense, the matter is that my voice has become very beautiful."

Abdel-Hamid pinned his looks on her for the seconds in which he remained confused, then exploded into hysterical laughter, like someone who had just heard an unending joke [...].

She began explaining what exactly had happened: after he had left home in the morning to go to work and after the children had gone off to school, she stayed alone in the house as usual and began to attend to her chores, sweeping, dusting, cooking and cleaning the rooms. Then after the noon call to prayers she said to herself: "Why not take a bath, woman. Pour a bucket of water over your body; it would freshen you up and remove the dirt." But after Sayeda had taken off her clothes and had twice washed her head, and as she was removing the soap from her eyes, it occurred to her to sing to entertain herself as usual. No sooner had she begun to sing "I like the life of freedom" than she felt as if another person had entered the bathroom, singing instead of her. The voice was not hers, was not the one to which she had been accustomed. It was a beautiful, melodious voice. She poured the water into her eyes, quickly removing the soap, and stared around the bathroom, turning around in search of that son of Adam or any other creature, invoking God's name, praying that He guard her against the devil. Her looks collided with nothing but the one window, tightly locked, and the mirror above the sink [...]. She said *Al-Tashahud* and fell silent

and continued to bathe. Only when she had made certain that there was no voice other than hers and the sound of the water flowing down her body did she return to singing "I like the life of freedom." The voice came out from her with more beauty, clarity and force [...].

She felt beautiful, a feeling she had not experienced for a very long time. This feeling entered her again. She paused looking at her face, reproaching herself for neglecting her eyebrows, leaving them unplucked, and was embarrassed at finding a faint moustache below her nose. She was saddened at leaving her hair uncombed for to that extent, then she felt angry at herself. Why did she neglect herself to that extent, if she possesses such a beautiful voice which comes from within? She stopped. Decided: "In order to sing I have to feel beautiful. By God, yes I have to [...]."

They entered the psychiatrist's room and sat down. The man who asked her about her problem seemed fed up, irritated, worried and in a hurry. Abdel-Hamid began to tell him the story briefly, but the doctor asked him, as he tapped with his pen on his desk's glass top, to let her speak [...]. When Sayeda had finished — having noticed that the man listened to her with interest and without interrupting — she asked him, smiling gaily, as she felt that he sympathised with her:

"Doctor, could I sing you a little song?"

No sign of interest appeared on the features of the doctor who seems to have been accustomed to such matters. He didn't smile, didn't grimace, didn't answer. Only wrote words in a foreign language on a piece of paper, then gave it to the husband and told him:

"Three pills a day of the first, following each meal, and one pill every night before going to sleep."

Then he turned to Sayeda saying:

"Avoid anything that causes you stress, and don't ever

stay alone, turn on the radio when you're in the bathroom, eat well, try to go for walks and to lose weight, you are over-weight. Take the medication regularly, and when you feel sick, or that your condition is worse, come straight to the clinic" [...].

As usual... she remained, alone at home. She got up languidly and unenthusiastically to pick up breakfast's dishes and ate what remained of the food on the plates [...].

And while she was in the bedroom, she found herself face to face with herself. She gazed in the mirror at herself in her nightgown: a face pale despite its plumpness; dead looks, and expressionless features as if drained of life. She tried to pull herself together and to sing: "O how beautiful life is, how beautiful". She tried hard again, the voice did not come out. Clearing her throat, she tried "I like the life of freedom", but no matter how hard she tried the voice trapped in her throat did not come out, as if a giant cork had stopped it. She continued trying to clear her voice by coughing, and finally decided to sing something else, "Ya layl ya 'ain, O night". Her old voice, the one she had known ever since she opened her eyes upon life, surprised her, her own voice, hoarse, weak, bereft of all beauty, clarity and force. She gazed at herself one more time. Her face was her old one, the face of the past. She smiled bitterly and shook her head in sorrow, then took the two medicine containers and went to empty them into the toilet.

*Excerpts from Kull hadha al-Sawt al-Jamil alladhi Yaani min Dakhilha, in Kull hadha al-Sawt al-Jamil (All That Beautiful Voice), Nour, Dar al-Maraa al-Arabiya, Cairo, 1994.*

Translated by Tahia Abdel-Nasser

### Books

## Gendering Orientalism

Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation, Reina Lewis, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. xiv + 267

Did European women produce Orientalist art and literature? Or did they criticise the assumptions of imperialist culture? *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* is the third volume in a series called "Gender, Racism, Ethnicity". According to the editors, the series aims to analyse "the intersections between gender, racism, ethnicity, class and sexuality within the contexts of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism." In this sense, Reina Lewis's book which argues that 19th century European women artists simultaneously subverted and supported the imperial project is an unqualified success.

The book is divided into two sections. Though it begins with a theoretical chapter called "Race — femininity — representation", most of *Gendering Orientalism* focuses on the lives of the French painter Henriette Browne and the British novelist George Eliot.

In the introductory chapter Lewis locates her work within the tradition of discourse theory. For the most part she ac-

cepts Edward Said's interpretation of Foucault, agreeing that French and British culture was based on the construction of an Orientalist Other, on a "mode of viewing based upon difference and Western superiority" (p.117), yet she criticises Said's characterisation of Orientalism as an intentional, monolithic, male discourse and argues that gender was an integral part of that discourse. Lewis also opposes Roland Barthes's "death of the author" approach which effectively denies women the possibility of narrative authority. In her search for a pragmatic deconstruction of writers and readers, Lewis moves beyond simple, historical binary oppositions — East/West, masculine/feminine, good/feminists/bad imperialists — and asks the reader to recognise the profound heterogeneity of Orientalism.

Though the introduction may prove slow-going for the non-specialist, the rest of the book is highly readable, beginning with a chapter on women painters in the nineteenth century. Because the Acad-

emie and the Ecole des Beaux Arts were closed to women, and because the critics were invariably male, opportunities were limited: women were restricted to portraiture and genre paintings, to exhibiting their feminine sensibilities without threatening the male-dominated world of "serious" art. More specifically, Lewis analyses the role of gender within the context of imperialism by evaluating Henriette Browne's Orientalist paintings (some of which are among the 40 well-chosen illustrations of Orientalist art included in the book).

Browne began her career with portraiture and domestic genre scenes but gained prominence through her representations of French nuns. The most famous is "The Sisters of Charity", a painting of two nuns caring for a sick child — the type of painting expected of a lady artist.

Following a trip to Constantinople in 1861, however, Browne produced two her- am interiors which caused a dilemma for

the critics. On the one hand, they were forced to credit Browne's interpretation because she had access to the harem (in the same way she had access to the convent). On the other hand, her depictions did not correspond to the Orientalist erotic fantasies of male painters. Browne's figures were fully clothed. The critics were unable to deny Browne's claims of authenticity, but they were equally loathe to let go of their Orientalist fantasies. Indeed, Lewis argues that the forbidden harem was the "key myth of Orientalism" and that Browne's paintings were troubling because the chaste and virtuous scenes she recorded called into question the assumed moral superiority of the West.

Lewis concludes *Gendering Orientalism* by comparing Browne's situation with that of George Eliot. As a result of being denied access to professional circles, the literary range of most 19th century European women writers was restricted to popular romances. Critics did not take them seriously and praised their work only to the

extent that it reflected "feminine" qualities such as sentimentality and a high moral tone. The novels of George Eliot were an exception; her work met with high critical acclaim. Thus, for Lewis, Eliot is the perfect subject for an analysis of the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity.

In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Eliot once remarked that her novel *Daniel Deronda* was an attempt to show understanding "not only towards the Jews, but towards all Oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact." This is how the book is usually interpreted. Lewis, however, uses this oft-quoted letter to support her contention that despite the novel's attempt to challenge stereotypes, *Daniel Deronda* nonetheless replicates imperialist and Orientalist notions of Otherness (p. 192). Eliot, Lewis argues, reaffirms the differences between the British and the Jews who, it turns out, are virtuous precisely to the degree that they display the qualities of the ideal Englishman.

Eliot's unconscious Orientalism which

failed to negotiate her own biases, Lewis shows, was very different from Browne's idealised Orientalism which depicted the harem as a model of domesticity. And these were but two modes of an Orientalist mode of viewing. "Orientalism, like any discourse," Reina Lewis reminds the reader, must be regarded as multivocal and heterogeneous" (p.4).

For further reading on this subject, I recommend *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, Sexuality, Religion and Work 1718-1918* by Billie Melman (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1992); *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* edited by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1992); and *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race and Gender, 1832-1898* by Anita Levy (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1991).

Reviewed by David R. Blanks

### Plain Talk

Last week Westminster College, Pennsylvania, conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws Degree on Mrs Suzanne Mubarak in recognition of her national and international role in creating a better future. The ceremony was transmitted by television and covered by the national press. Nothing, however, compares with attending the actual event and following the proceedings on a first-hand basis.

A host of intellectuals, ministers, diplomats and members of Mrs Mubarak's various associations gathered to witness the momentous event. Most touching were the words of Dr. Samuel Habib, Westminster College's official representative in Egypt, enumerating such achievements as national and children's libraries and the "Reading for All" project. Dr. Oscar Ruznick, Cancellor of Westminster College, aptly described Mrs Mubarak as "an example of a global citizen" and also provided an account of projects that she has initiated in the field of development.

I have always been of the opinion that the degree of a country's civilization is reflected in the status of its women. A civilized society is one that bestows equal rights, in addition to a leading role in the field of development, upon its women. Egypt, fortunately, is blessed with women whose efforts and accomplishments put them on a par with women in advanced countries. I can truly claim that, through my experience and work in a number of Western countries, that Egyptian women are, in many ways, more of equal partners in the development of their country than in many advanced nations.

Some may scoff at honorary degrees, but I believe that such degrees are similar to the Nobel Prize, conferred not as academic degrees, for research in a specific field, but rather for a life-long work which has benefited humanity.

What impressed me most at the ceremony was Mrs Mubarak's modesty, and her payment of tribute to other national and international organisations which helped her in her quest for a better future. In a candid manner, Mrs Mubarak charted the different stages of her work, citing both successes and difficulties. First came an idealistic starry-eyed phase, when she thought she could "move mountains", which corresponded with the creation of the Integrated Care Society. The Society concentrated its activities in one of Cairo's slum districts. The project proved so successful that an American writer, Andres Rugh, produced a book about the project.

The second phase was described by Mrs Mubarak as one of realism and fast steps, when she came to realise that procedure should be given to children. During this phase, her activities extended beyond the establishment of libraries and delved into the realm of children's culture, education, medical and health care, the Children's Museum and the "Reading for All" project. It was a period of sharing dreams and developing stronger ties of cooperation with other NGOs.

The third phase, according to Mrs Mubarak, was that of transcending national boundaries and cooperating with such international organisations as UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO. This cooperation emanated from a conviction that there are common problems — poverty, environmental issues, education, food, human rights — which should be tackled on an international level.

The climax of the ceremony came when Dr James Wimmer, member of the Westminster College Board of Trustees, placed the hood on Mrs Mubarak. It was a moment of intense feelings and heightened emotion. Mrs Mubarak was not receiving that honour just for herself, but for all the women of Egypt.

Mursi Saad El-Din



# Urban globe

**As Habitat II enters its second week in Istanbul, a US senator has voiced the complaint that UN world conferences have forced the US to spend much-needed-at-home taxpayers' dollars to finance its participation. Is it worth the money, he inquires. Fayza Hassan finds out how a conference on cities can make a difference**

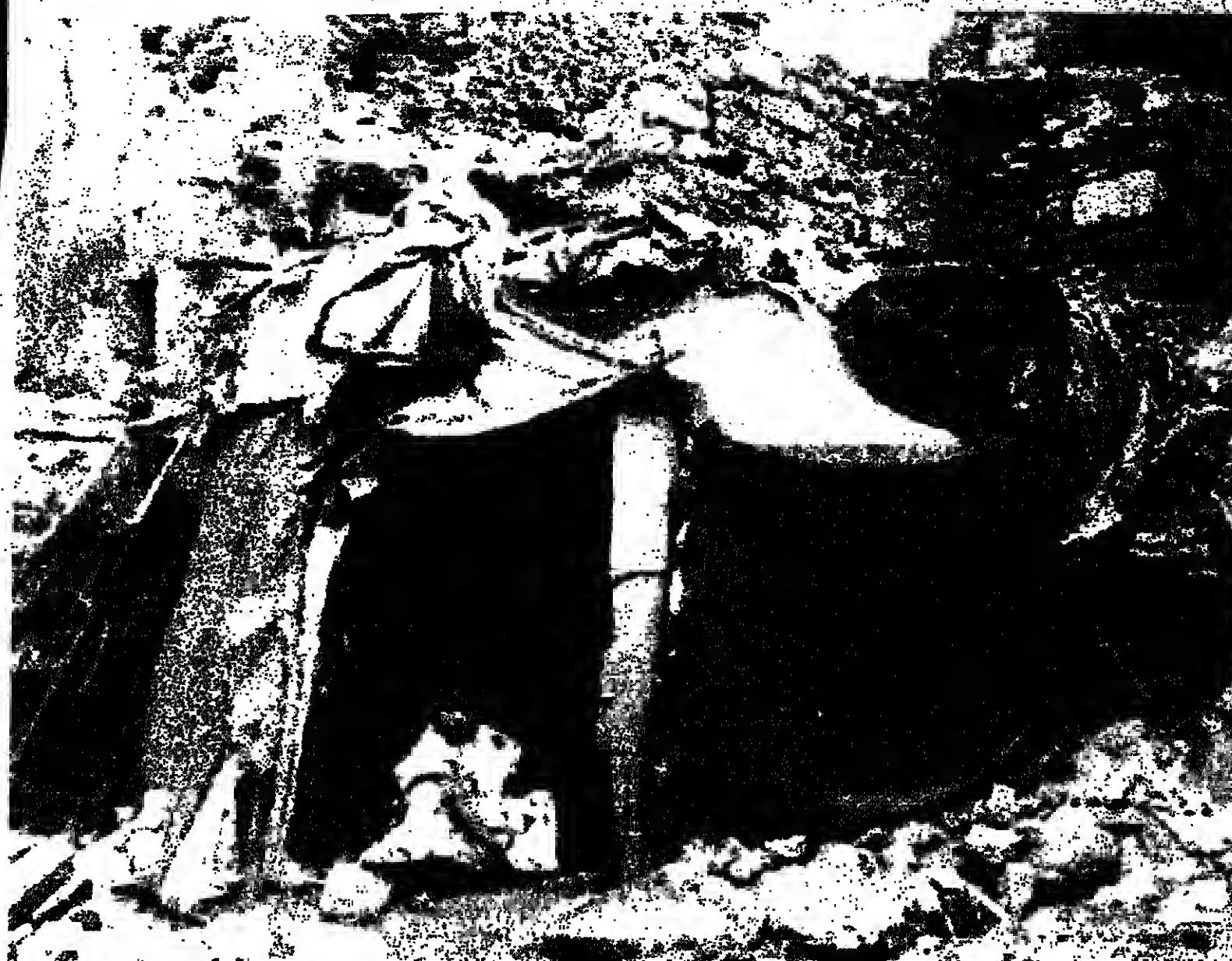


photo: Sherif Sonbol

"The Global Report on Human Settlements" released in March 1996 by the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat II), now being discussed in Istanbul, reveals that 500 million urban dwellers are either homeless or live in inadequate housing. "The most pressing global environmental, economic and social issues that we will face in the next century will be in cities," said Dr Wally N'Dow, head of Habitat and the secretary-general of Habitat II, in his opening address.

Problems are getting worse because housing cannot keep up with an exploding urban population which will double from 2.4 billion in 1995 to 5 billion in 2025. Cities however, will remain the engines of social, economic and environmental development providing the greatest opportunities for the poor. Housing shortages and poor housing conditions, the result of massive urbanisation, are life-threatening, N'Dow said.

"The Global Report on Human Settlements" revealed that sub-standard housing, unsafe water and poor sanitation in densely populated cities are responsible for 10 million deaths worldwide each year. Water-borne disease alone kill four million infants and children annually. Homelessness is a problem in developed as well as in developing countries, but while inadequate urban housing conditions are a global problem its consequences are much worse in developing countries where 600 million people live in life-and-health-threatening homes in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

By the year 2025, 80 per cent of

the global urban populations will live in developing countries, according to the report projection. The management of urban resources must therefore be addressed urgently, and it is with the aim of discussing improvement strategies that the Istanbul conference has convened.

It has now been generally recognised that governments acting alone will not be able to successfully respond to the challenge of the population explosion. Habitat II is promoting partnerships between local governments, the private sector and citizens' groups to find a solution. Egypt's participants to the conference include members of the Alexandria Businessmen Association and districts' governors as well as Egyptian NGOs and professional development consultants.

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements is the body mandated to assist countries and communities to solve some of the root causes of urban problems "through concerted action and policy improvement in the human settlements sector". As part of this effort, Habitat has launched the Global Best Practices Initiative in Improving the Living Environment as part of the preparation for the conference. This initiative identifies, compiles and disseminates examples of how effective partnerships between the public, private, and non-governmental sectors are able to solve some of the world's most pressing urban problems.

These Best Practices, defined as "action which has resulted in tangible impact on improving living

conditions", represent case-studies of successful experiences in partnership. A number of Best Practices presented at the conference will allow other countries to learn from the experience. In many cases the solution can be adopted and/or adapted by other communities with similar problems.

Authors of Best Practices have been asked to undertake a gender analysis of their Best Practices to ascertain the impact of their actions on both women and men. Best Practices address the areas of job creation, housing, crime prevention, land and access to finance and basic services. In a ceremony which took place on 4 June, awards of excellence (Habitat Awards of Excellence) in Improving the Living Environment sponsored by the Municipality of Dubai and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government were given to the ten most deserving initiatives.

Among the crucial problems that are being addressed by the conference is poor water quality and dwindling reserves of fresh water. It is estimated that Egypt is already consuming 95 per cent of its available water resources and will, along with several regions of the world, face severe water deficits within the next few decades. The World Meteorological Organisation reports that global use of water is expected to triple well before the year 2050. Even where adequate resources are available, the ineffective infrastructure for water supply, in rapidly expanding cities, will make the supply of potable water less reliable. We may be facing a situation

in the future where water will become a commodity as expensive as petrol, commented a journalist, reporting on the conference's Water for Thirsty Cities forum.

Habitat II is also highlighting the role of women in helping to shape the future development of human settlements. According to a Habitat report, "Women play multiple roles as homemakers, caretakers of children and the elderly, and as breadwinners working both within and outside the house". Basing their women's agenda on the Platform for Action adopted in 1995, in Beijing, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Habitat recommends that:

1. The design of housing and provision of basic services takes into account the different perspectives and requirements of women and men.
2. Government authorities at all levels responsible for shelter planning integrate gender perspectives as part of legislation, public policies and housing projects.
3. Credit institutions and lending programmes become accessible to women.
4. Training and extension services in both urban and rural areas to be made available to women including young women who lack access to traditional sources of collateral.
5. Women to be actively and practically encouraged to enter shelter-related professions — architecture, engineering, construction, management and planning — which are still largely male-dominated.
6. Emergency shelter programmes for refugees and victims of natural and human-made catastrophes to

make provisions for women's safety and health needs.

Moreover, laws governing divorce, inheritance and property rights should not place women at a disadvantage, but protect women's equal access to resources and ownership.

Policy makers need to confront the many obstacles that prevent women from participating fully in human settlements development. The returns from investing in women has been fully documented: Women spend a greater proportion of their earnings on the family and when they derive an income from their work, their children enjoy better food, health and education.

As in the case of all other UN conferences, the final document of Habitat II will not be binding, even after ratification by the participating governments. It will nevertheless have sounded the alarm and stirred some, if not all, governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as the private sector and individuals into realising that shelter is a problem that concerns us all. Turning our back on its present inadequacy may exact a price in the future that no one will be in a position to pay. This will be clearly reflected in the Plan of Action that the participants will issue before winding up the last UN conference of the century. They will also have to rule on whether shelters should be considered a basic human right. The question is: even in the unlikely event that participating nations recognise this right and ratify the Plan of Action, how can they be made to abide by it?

Fayza Hassan

## Sufra Dayma

### Makloub

**Ingredients:**  
1 kg aubergine  
1 1/2 kg veal chunks (boneless)  
2 cups rice  
One onion (grated)  
One tomato (grated)  
Corn oil (to fry aubergines)  
Butter (to fry aubergines)  
One bouillon cube  
Salt-pepper-allspice-cinnamon-nutmeg (grated)+1 bay leaf

**Method:**  
Peel the aubergines and slice them thick (2 centimeters thickness). Fry them in oil only until golden, on both sides, and leave aside. Wash the rice and soak it in hot water for one hour. In the meantime, fry the onion in the butter and until yellowish, then add the meat and continue frying over high heat until you brown the meat well. Add the cube and the spices, then stir them all together, then add 4 cups of water and bring to boil. Lower the heat and leave to cook until meat is tenderised, but not well cooked. Remove the bay leaf and add the fried aubergines and bring to boil with the meat only for 3 minutes, then add the rice after straining it, making sure the liquid in the pan covers it only by one centimeter. Bring to boil and immediately lower the heat to the lowest and place the pan on top of a simmering ring until the rice is cooked. Remove from heat and leave the pan to rest for 5 minutes, then place a serving dish on top of the pan, hold it firmly and turn pan upside down over the serving dish. Serve Makloub hot with babaghnagh and green salads.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

## Restaurant review

### Banging the lantern

Nigel Ryan attends to Chinese whispers

All things have their season, not least the Fu Shing Chinese restaurant, tucked neatly away just off Talaat Harb. It should be the subject of a preservation order, a memento of those easy-going days when Chinese food outside China — or at least outside Chinatown — was a novelty, when every well-appointed home did not boast a wok and when a swish maid the frying pan and quick dousing in soy sauce could easily pass as cuisine.

This not too distant past, a more innocent place by far, can easily be revisited. The rules are simple. You ascend a flight of steps, carpeted wall to wall and musty in that wall-to-wall carpeted way, in order to enter a large, oblong dining room. This will be mostly empty, an implied acknowledgement of the fact that you have to be in the right mood for this particular version of nostalgia, though on the day I visited, who should I see at the only other occupied table but the *Weekly's* very own photographer, Sherif Sonbol. Simply glance around, select your table, then walk slap bang into one of those scarlet-tasseled lanterns that look as if they should be hanging on the branches of a Christmas tree.

The collision announces that you have arrived in the recreation of Shanghai that flourished on high streets everywhere, its heyday sometime between the student uprisings of 1968 and the hegemony achieved by Laura Ashley flower prints in the mid-seventies. Such establishments have, as all such phenomena do, managed, in places, to hang on.

One of their most characteristic features, abandoned in the newer generation of Chi-

nese eateries, was the extent of the menu. Fu Shing will not let down nostalgia purists — its menu might as well go on for ever. Everything is neatly numbered, Wittgenstein like. From this lengthy document we selected bean curd in soy sauce, mushrooms and bean sprouts with salt dried vegetables, shredded beef with salt dried vegetables, steamed rice and fried dumplings.

Now there was no surprise with the dumplings — they are what they are — except the quantity, which was on the gluttonous side of generosity. The bean curd in soy sauce was pronounced fine by my companion, while the mushrooms and salt-dried vegetables proved my particular favourite. Admittedly there was an absence of salt drying, though the bean sprouts and mushrooms were at least fresh.

Nostalgia purists are entitled to feel at least a little let down by the absence of the chopstick, though such disappointments may well be compensated by the over-generous addition of monosodium glutamate, that essential component of period Chinese.

Service proved efficient, with the large waiters negotiating the tables with surprising agility. Nor is this particular trip down memory lane likely to break the bank. We consumed copious amounts of food for less than LE60.

For anyone wishing to recreate, in a slightly more contemporary setting, the Proustian Madeleine experience, Fu Shing is the place. It practically conjures up the face of Madame Mao.

Fu Shing Chinese Restaurant, 28 Talaat Harb Street, Downtown. Tel: 575 61 84

## Al-Ahram Weekly

### Crossword

By Samia Abdonour

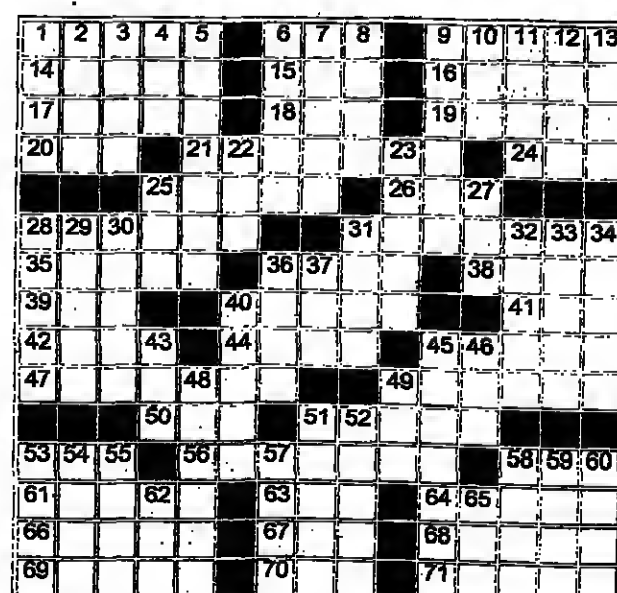
#### ACROSS

1. Pole; employee (5)
6. Former British currency abb. (3)
9. Rank; lineage (5)
14. Embankment (5)
15. Munched (3)
16. Point of attachment of seed to seed-vessel (5)
17. Eat away (5)
18. Electrically charged particle (3)
19. southern African antelope (5)
20. Weather directions (3)
21. 19th century British novelist (7)
24. Gymnast's need (3)
25. Brusque (5)
26. Poetic for "over" (3)
28. Caricature (6)
31. Small ring (7)
35. Falls into water without splash (5)
36. Anticipation (4)
38. Describing some skirts

DOWN

1. Massacred (4)
2. Bird resembling gull (4)
3. Alleged (4)
4. Nurtured (3)
5. Tributaries (7)
6. Laymen (5)
7. Feed with fuel (5)
8. Bare sandy tract (4)
9. Elected (6)
10. Bearing (3)
11. Emaciated (4)
12. Musical instrument (4)
13. Discharge (4)
22. Rage (3)
23. Composition for nine singers (5)
25. Edge (3)
27. Grog (3)
28. Garden implement (5)
29. Out of harmony (5)
30. Crypts (5)
31. Polygonal recess (4)
32. Hammer, extent (5)
33. Clyster (5)
34. Periodically flowing and ebbing (5)
36. Sharpen (4)
37. Type of grain (3)
40. European nobleman (5)
43. Initials of high explosive
45. Sea-fowl (7)
46. Messenger of genetic code, abb. (3)
48. North African sheep (6)
49. Homo Sapiens (3)
51. Great artery (5)
52. Passed cooked potatoes through device to form thin strings (5)
53. Totals (4)
54. Fidget (4)
55. Paving material (4)
57. Rostrom (4)
58. Chime (4)
59. Prep. of location (4)
60. Paradise (4)
62. Greek letter (3)
65. Eavesdrop (3)

Last week's solution



12. Musical instrument (4)
13. Discharge (4)
22. Rage (3)
23. Composition for nine singers (5)
25. Edge (3)
27. Grog (3)
28. Garden implement (5)
29. Out of harmony (5)
30. Crypts (5)
31. Polygonal recess (4)
32. Hammer, extent (5)
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55. Paving material (4)
57. Rostrom (4)
58. Chime (4)
59. Prep. of location (4)
60. Paradise (4)
62. Greek letter (3)
65. Eavesdrop (3)

سكس لاجل



States of emergency in millions of homes across the country have been lifted for the moment. *Al-Ahram Weekly* takes the chance to explore the paradox — or is it — of billions of pounds worth of private tutoring, round-the-clock studying, sweat, tears and life savings — all expended to produce badly educated graduates

# The memorising machines

Zeinab Mustafa, is used to being at the top of her class in England. She's now in an Egyptian secondary school, and has to settle for exam scores averaging 75 per cent. The reason — she's not used to memorising entire textbooks in preparation for a final exam. "In England, teachers favoured in class work and other activities, as well as exam scores, when determining the grades," said Zeinab. Not so here.

The Ministry of Education last year, in a bid to bring to a halt the practice whereby some teachers abuse their authority and pressure students to take private lessons, canceled course work as part of the educational evaluation system. The decision backfired. Instead of drawing to a close the era of private lessons, education experts maintain that the new system has served only to undermine the means by which students are evaluated on an academic level.

As it now stands, student grades are determined solely on their final exam results — criteria which experts agree is fundamentally unsound given the existing weaknesses in the examination system. "It's much more reasonable to include course work as part of the criteria by which a student is evaluated," said Adel Azer, a United Nations social policy consultant. "I believe they [the

Just how far off target is Egypt's educational system in creating analytical thinkers, ask Jasmine Maklad and Gihan Shahine

Ministry of Education] implemented this system because some teachers used the old system to make a profit for themselves. Nonetheless, I don't think that abolishing grades for course work is a solution."

"There's no way you can accurately evaluate someone based on one exam," stressed Hassan Wagih, an education expert and professor at Al-Azhar University. "An exam only tests how well you know the material on the day of the exam," he said, adding that it is essential that assignments, quizzes and projects also be factored into the equation. Even then, you are only approximating a student's ability, he said. "The new system lacks reliability and validity."

To compound matters, when all the weight is placed on one exam, students are understandably placed under tremendous pressure to achieve. In more cases than not, they simply freeze. "If there is only one exam, students are likely to be terrified, and this will affect their performance," explained Wagih. Consequently, their fear serves only to inhibit their creativity, he added. "Exams should not be tools of intimidating students, but this is what today's exams do," he said.

"The entire philosophy and approach must be changed."

Any changes won't come too soon for Isis Talaat, a student in the first year of *Thanawiya Amma*. For Talaat, crying has become a daily routine, tearful representation of the dread and fear she feels in anticipation of the exam. "I always feel that I'm going to forget all the information as soon as I get into the exam room," she said. The syllabus, she added, is overwhelming. She has two biology books, and another two for German. "The exam is always so long that I sometimes forget to write down some of the information that I already know by heart," said Talaat.

Psychological pressure aside, however, the exams are also criticised as being inaccurate tools for assessing the abilities of students. The emphasis in these exams is on memorising the material rather than problem solving, logic, creativity and critical analysis. "Exams only test the students' memorisation skills," stated Wagih, adding that the educational system is, in effect, seeking to distinguish between those who can and cannot memorise their textbooks.

"The exams stress memorisation because the curriculum is still based on memorisation," explained Azer. "Students are not taught how to think or be analytical, so how can we test them on these things?"

Both teachers and students are aware of the problems and are trying hard to adjust to the new system, irrespective of its flaws. "I have already forgotten the stuff I was tested on two weeks ago," said Hala El-Said, a 9th grade student. "Most of us in class just study to pass the final exams; that's what it is all about." As a result, instead of studying throughout the year, El-Said opts for the infamous cram sessions which begin during the last few months of school. "It makes sense to do it this way given that whatever I do during the rest of the school year doesn't count," she said.

Since the new system was adopted most students have decided to do enough just to get by. "All through the year, my students were simply not interested in understanding anything or participating in class," complained Inas Abul-Fotouh, an English teacher at a private language school in Heliopolis. "Students have become very passive,"

agreed Fawzia El-Duweik, head of the science department in a Maadi school. "They focus on cramming and memorising during the last few months, making it unfair to think of assessing them on these grounds, let alone how this will help determine [or undermine] their future."

The MOE is fully aware that the current examination system is not satisfactory, said Fouad Abu-Hatab, under-secretary of the Ministry of Education. "We cannot examine the students' analytical skills when the curriculum itself depends primarily on memorisation," he said.

Ministry guidelines, however, require that 50 per cent of the questions be based on memorisation, said one member of the *Thanawiya Amma*'s examination board who preferred to remain anonymous. This board assesses the syllabus and its targets, prepares the exams and sets the length of time within which they should be completed.

Both the current educational system and the means by which students are evaluated, said Azer, will have lasting effects on students. "We're turning out graduates who have no creative or analytical abilities. This

system churns out passive learners who will most probably become passive human beings," he said. "Unfortunately the Egyptian educational system breeds generations of people who are not even equipped to compete in the 20th century, let alone the 21st."

The deteriorating educational system, said Wagih, has already taken its toll on Egypt's work force, consequently negatively impacting on overseas employment opportunities for Egyptians. "We used to have a very good market in the Gulf, but now it is being shaken because the workforce is not up to par," he added.

The ministry is already working on a plan to improve the current examination system, said Abu-Hatab. "The plan will concentrate on changing the curriculum, updating existing teaching methods and reformulating the examination system. It should be in place by the year 2000," he said.

But this is just not enough, say education experts. "The entire system must be changed," stressed Azer. "It needs a complete overhaul," agreed Wagih. "They can change the exams, the books, the teachers and the curriculum as much as they want, but unless they change the philosophy behind learning there will be no improvement," he said.

## Another brick in the wall

Private lessons have become a mainstay of the Egyptian educational system, generating billions in revenue. But no one seems to want them. Amira Ibrahim investigates



Nagi

For some 650,000 high school students, the crucial final exams are now over. The stress, however, lingers on. With four chances to take the *Thanawiya Amma* (final high school exams), rest is not an option for the already-weary students. Mammoth study sessions continue, as does burning the midnight oil and taking the exceedingly costly private lessons that have become part and parcel of the Egyptian educational system.

As a whole, Egyptian families shell out several billion pounds per year for private lessons to supplement the generally deficient course work offered at schools. For many households, budgeting an additional LE600-LE800 a month for these tutorials, along with their regular household expenses, is a heavy burden to shoulder. And, it is one of which the Ministry of Education (MOE) is well aware. A 1979 study by the National Centre for Sociological and Sociological Research (NCCSR) revealed that 33 per cent of primary school students, 45 per cent of secondary students and 70 per cent of high school students take private lessons. With the cost of these lessons ranging from LE20-50 per lesson, per student, that adds up to a hefty chunk of change. According to a National Council for Education report, in 1990 Egyptians spent about LE800 million on private lessons. By 1995, the figure had rocketed to LE7 billion.

Complaints on the part of parents and education experts are resounding loudly, and the MOE is listening. When Hussein Kamel Baha'eddin took over as minister of education in 1992, one of his goals was to draw to a close the era of private lessons. By 1997, the net earning from this enterprise, however, revealed that this goal may be too ambitious. "We're doing our best to do away with this practice, but it's not as easy as it may seem," said Baha'eddin. "It's a deeply-rooted practice that is exacerbated by many factors, most significantly, overburdened schools." Also fueling the fire are the low salaries for teachers, who, said the education minister, make on average only LE300 per month. The problem is more deeply

rooted than many would believe. In 1929, Smouha Pasha, Egypt's first prime minister, resigned from his post confident that he had tackled all the issues on his agenda except for two: private lessons and distributing offices among his aides. Subsequent ministers of education have tried, in vain, to tackle the former issue.

Currently, the MOE has launched a number of initiatives to address the problem. To confront what Baha'eddin dubs, "the private lessons Mafia", an investigation office has been established to deal with reports of corrupt educational practices. Moreover, he recently announced that teachers who give private lessons are obliged to register with the Tax Authority. This is easier said than done. Only 4,000 teachers are currently registered in this department. Tax officials note that the reason that this figure is so low is that unless students or school administrators report teachers who offer these lessons, they can remain in the shadows.

Additionally, on a more general level, the MOE has adopted a three-pronged programme aimed at reducing the number of students in overcrowded schools, improving the working conditions for teachers, developing a new curriculum and dividing the *Thanawiya Amma* (final exams) into two years instead of having them in one shot. Part of this plan requires that 1,500 schools be built every year, so as to keep pace with the population growth rate. The target goal for the number of schools to be built is 10,000. Other measures include teacher training programmes to boost teaching skills. Included in this training programme are 800 annual scholarships whereby teachers are able to study in foreign institutions. Even so, these reforms have done little to temper the situation. Critics allege that the new *Thanawiya Amma* system has, over the past two years, actually resulted in a 10-20 per cent increase in private lessons. So what then is the real reason behind this growing phenomenon?

According to Abdel-Aziz Anis, a professor at Ain Shams University and a former MOE consultant on educational policy, it

was former President Anwar El-Sadat's *Infitah* (open-door) policies which were largely to blame for the surge in private lessons. Tackling the matter in a book entitled *Education in the Infitah Era*, Anis argued that, "In the 1970s, as a result of this policy, private educational institutions catering primarily to those with the means to afford the tuition, began to appear. With the goal more to make money than to educate, the educational process in the 1970s rapidly shifted from the schools to the homes, gaining momentum as a profitable underground business."

"We've succeeded in defeating the currency black market, but we've failed with private lessons," Anis told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Anis is among those who feels that the educational crisis faced by the nation cannot be tackled separately from other social issues. He doubts that the new educational budget increase for 1996 will bear much fruit. The budget stands at LE11.8 billion for 1996. In 1990, this figure was LE3.4 billion.

"It's useless to reform the educational system without addressing other related problems," said Anis. "Education... is not like building bridges or providing public transportation systems; these issues can be tackled separately. The social system is one unit, therefore, reform must be implemented at all levels including the health care system, education, salary structures."

In this context, it doesn't make much sense to increase teachers' salaries without implementing other social changes. "It's a vicious cycle, [and can only be] tackled by all branches of the government. Some teachers' capitalise on parents' concerns and convince families that private lessons are necessary, even when they are not. As a fourth-year student at a private secondary school, Hani, and his family, find that even the LE5,000 they pay in tuition annually is not enough to prevent him from entering the private lessons cycle.

gauge schools rocketed to LE50, pushing up with it the cost of regular private lessons to LE40-60.

These repeated efforts and failures have left parents at a loss. Not really ready, willing or able to tackle these macro issues on their own, parents are motivated by the understandable concern that their children pass these crucial year-end exams with flying colours. Consequently, argue some education experts, they turn to private lessons — in so doing, perpetuating the "vicious cycle."

"Confused and distraught, parents look for the easy way out that guarantees results, no matter the cost," said Fouad Abu-Hatab, under-secretary of the Ministry of Education and dean of the Educational Studies Institute. He notes that while they may be unaware of how this perpetuates the cycle, these families are also rendering themselves vulnerable to teachers inclined to exploit the situation. Some teachers' capitalise on parents' concerns and convince families that private lessons are necessary, even when they are not.

As a fourth-year student at a private secondary school, Hani, and his family, find that even the LE5,000 they pay in tuition annually is not enough to prevent him from entering the private lessons cycle. "I began taking private lessons in my first year at school," he said, recalling his first experience with private lessons. "The subjects we were studying in secondary school were totally different from what

we took in preparatory school, and I needed the extra help."

Hani used to take private lessons in eight subjects, paying between LE20-30 every day. But about three months before the exams, he and a group of eight students, got together for a tutorial which generally does not last more than 20 minutes. Instead of intensive revision, however, the teacher just hands out some papers, collects the money and rushes off to another group. "They never even teach a lesson," he complained.

As a result of incidents such as these, teachers have been on the receiving end of much of the blame for these lessons. Branded unscrupulous or money-hungry, the public is confronted with daily horror stories of how students were coerced into taking private lessons in order to pass the exams, irrespective of how well they would perform were they left to their own devices. There is some truth to this theory, but to every argument, there are two sides.

Khaled, a young teacher, was not ashamed of giving private lessons under such circumstances. "Many of the students who voice these complaints are the same ones who are seeking to buy a degree versus learning for the sake of learning," he said. "In these cases, there's a fair price for everything. I was forced to pay thousands of pounds to school administrators to get a job in a private school that caters to wealthy students."

Not many, especially in the MOE, sympathise with Khaled.

Ministry officials contend that it is teachers like him who retard efforts at reforming the system. Consequently, many of the current initiatives, such as the recently-established investigations offices and the registration at the tax department requirement, are geared at stemming such "unscrupulous" practices.

Ministry officials are quick to point out that these allegations are levelled against a minority of the teachers and are not attempts to divert scrutiny of the real issue at hand, educational reform. Teachers, said Abu-Hatab, must be afforded the chance to regain confidence and pride in their profession. "They deserve our appreciation and should be recognised as leaders who help shape the society," he said. "This will only happen if they are given a decent salary and recognition." As a means to the end, he suggested implementing an incentive system similar to the one granted university professors.

"School teachers are as important as university professors," stated Abu-Hatab. "They are charged with shaping the minds of the country's youth."

What emerges from this scenario, however, is a variation on the chicken and egg syndrome — which came first, the corrupt educational practices or a shoddy school system and overworked, under-appreciated teachers. In either case, the solution, at least, according to Anis, will have to be reached through a cooperative effort.

## School daze

HINDERED by the exorbitant prices requested by renowned private tutors, students, who have all but given up on getting a quality education in schools, are increasingly turning to educational centres as a last recourse for the exam blues. As a spin-off from the educational services provided by mosques and churches in the 1980s, final revision centres, as they have come to be known, have become a fiscally prudent last resort for many struggling students. But, argue critics and educational experts, they are the educational equivalents of potato chips in terms of providing food for thought.

Lecture fees at these centres range from LE10 in lower middle class districts to LE25 at more prestigious centres. The prices at lesser-known centres are underwritten by charitable associations, mosques and churches. For an additional fee, students can acquire a notebook with the teacher's suggestions for ideal answers to final exam questions.

Many of these organisations, however, are by no means charitable. They are operating along lines that would make staunch market economists proud. They are listed by the Tax Authority as commercial enterprises clearly reflecting the fact that for their administrators and staff, the profit motive rules the day. And this is what many educational experts, officials and families object to: Instead of redressing deficiencies manifested in a failing educational system, they more often than not, directly exacerbate the issue, offering short-term cures to long-term ailments.

"School is more than just a place where teachers pass on information to students," explained Fouad Abu-Hatab, an under-secretary of the Ministry of Education. "They are a place where children acquire socialisation skills and society's guidelines for appropriate behaviour." In this regard, these institutes are severely lacking.

Instead of learning how to think, or developing an understanding and appreciation of the value of analytical thought, Abu-Hatab noted that these institutes prosper because "students are given, word for word, the answers they need to pass the exam." Consequently, the only cognitive skills which are developed are those for rote memorisation.

As the debate over which is the best way to reform an educational system that makes private lessons a necessity versus a luxury rages, these institutes continue to rake in the cash, hand over fist.

A recent television and newspaper advertising campaign launched by a teacher to solicit students underscores this point. Talaat Hammam kicked off an LE150,000 media campaign to draw students, but ended up attracting the attention of the authorities instead. They promptly closed down some of the centres where he teaches.

Education officials argued that his actions were undermining educational reform efforts, distracting people from the real issue at hand and simply offering the equivalent of an educational placebo. He sees it differently.

"Education is a commodity that must be publicised as much as any other commodity," he said. "I didn't pay for the ad campaign out of my pocket. It was funded by the 14 centres I teach at, each of which put in LE10,000."

"We didn't do anything wrong," argued Hammam. "We don't pressure the students in the way that schools do — we simply offer our services at a nominal rate to those who cannot afford private lessons."

## Blue book blues

Exam phobia is understandable, but during this year's *Thanawiya Amma*, students were almost sweating bullets, reports Amany Abdel-Moneim

Rehab did not expect her *Thanawiya Amma* (final high school exams) to be easy, but neither did she expect to walk out of them crying, having been unable to answer a good portion of the questions. She was not alone. Out of the almost 500,000 students who sat for the exams this year, thousands voiced complaints that the questions were too difficult, vague, long or simply not representative of the material covered by the syllabus distributed by the Ministry of Education to all state-run schools. The English, biology and physics exams of the first part of the *Thanawiya Amma* drew the most complaints.

The ramifications of these charges are far reaching given that the results of the *Thanawiya Amma* exams determine the university and faculty in which a student will be accepted. They are also made more poignant in light of the fact that a new exam system was introduced this year, dividing what used to be a one-year exam over two years.

To diffuse the situation and placate irate parents and distraught students, the Ministry of Education set up two special committees to

investigate the charges. The first committee's finding revealed that the questions were worded in such a way as to make them accessible to the average student. But in contrast, the second committee's investigations revealed that some of the questions were not ones which could be answered based on the current curriculum. Consequently, they devised a grading curve to compensate students for the exam's shortcomings. The most decisive action, however, was taken by the ministry itself when it, for the first time, transferred the individuals responsible for the poor judgment manifested in planning the exam to other governorates, and forbade them from planning other exams.

This is not to say that educational experts and ministry officials all concurred that the exams were unfair, or that the solution to the country's educational dilemma lies in punishing those preparing the exams. A more prudent course of action would be to raise the system's standards.

Mohamed Ahmed Haridi, under-secretary of the Ministry of Ed-

ucation and general director of the Examination Department, noted that another special committee's findings indicate that 80 per cent of the questions were on par with the standards of the average student, 90 per cent were accessible to above average students and 100 per cent were manageable for outstanding students. The special committee was comprised of various university professors, educational experts and professors from the National Examination Centre and was charged with verifying whether the exam was in accord with ministry guidelines.

While Rehab was crying at home, other students in private language schools were voicing mixed reviews. "The English exam was easy, except for the comprehension section," said Yasmeen Guindy, who has just finished her first-stage *Thanawiya Amma* exams. "I've always been considered an above average student, but I didn't understand even in Arabic the meaning of some of the words in the part of the exam."

Iham Nassar, another first-stage student, found the exam to be

fair. "I think that anyone who studies hard and concentrates will be able to pass the exam," she said. "But if the exam is made too easy, then there will be no real bases upon which outstanding students can be distinguished from among the rest."

Almud Shawki, a final year student, thinks Nasser is way off the mark. "Only 30 or 40 per cent of the questions were answerable by even above average students," he complained. "And, there wasn't enough time to finish." Among Shawki's other complaints was that the three week interval between the exam and the make-up test was not enough for adequate preparation, and that it should be given in one year instead of over two. "This way, you'd be stressed for only one year," he explained.

Ministry officials like Haridi, however, are reluctant to swallow these reasons hook, line and sinker. The main reason why many students in Cairo and Giza had so much trouble, said Haridi, is that they relied on private lessons instead of focusing on the materials provided by the schools. They refused to listen to the warnings, he said.



# Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

In the following short entry in his annals on 28 March, 1896, El-Jabarti offers us a succinct encapsulation of that vibrant world of mingling crowds known as the *moulid*. He writes:

"This is the time of the *moulid* of Sidi Ahmed Badawi in Tanta to which of the people of this country hasten to attend, hiring camels and donkeys at the highest of costs, because for the people of the provinces, this is too auspicious a season to miss, whether for the purpose of religious homage, commerce, amusement or debauchery."

While El-Jabarti's portrait at the outset of the century was limited to a few *moulids* such as that of El-Husseini in Cairo and Sidi Badawi in Tanta, *Al-Ahram*, the chronicle of its times, provided a more detailed coverage of these events. Yet, its account shares the same points of focus: religion, economy, entertainment and depravity. *Al-Ahram* of course had certain advantages over El-Jabarti. The early 19th century chronicler had to rely on chance meetings with visitors, whereas the end of the century chronicler had at his disposal a network of correspondents stationed throughout the country who could avail themselves of the modern postal, telegraph and transportation facilities.

The advances in communications and transportation not only helped *Al-Ahram* cover the *moulids*, they had a profound effect on the character of the *moulids* themselves. Now, more people could visit the *moulids* than ever before and the Railway Authority was all too ready to be of service, as we learn from several advertisements and bulletins in *Al-Ahram*.

One announcement reads, "An additional train will be running between Tanta and Cairo in order to transport third-class passengers for the occasion of the *moulid* of El-Sayed El-Ahmed." This service will be discontinued at the end of the *moulid*.

Two more bulletins originate from *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Tanta. The first, dated 11 March, 1891, says, "There are approximately 4,000 more visitors arriving in Tanta by train than at this time last year." Three days later he writes, "One cannot help but convey the general delight of the public in the operations of the Railway Authority which did its utmost to ensure the comfort and convenience of its passengers. As a result of which there were 10,000 more people coming to Tanta by rail this year than last year."

Because of its communications network, the *moulids* *Al-Ahram* was able to cover were more numerous and increasingly far flung. In addition to the two best known *moulids*, El-Husseini and Sidi Badawi, which *Al-Ahram* customarily covered every year, it covered the comparatively minor *moulids* of El-Rifa'i, El-Sultan Abul-Ela, El-Sayed Nefissa and El-Sayed Zeinab in Cairo, as well as the one major *moulid* in Alexandria, *Al-Ahram's* home city, the *moulid* of Sidi Gaber. In addition, one can count no less than 14 *moulids* that it covered in the provinces: Abul-Rish in Dammanhur, El-Bastawel in El-Mahalla, Abul-Ma'at in Damietta, El-Maligi in Matig, El-Birhami in Desouq, El-Ahfi in Banha, Sidi Ghazi in Bulqas and Kafi El-Dawar and El-Rifa'i in

Port Said. As for the *moulids* in Upper Egypt, they were not as numerous or as closely covered. These were the *moulids* of El-Qenawi from Qena, Abul-Qasem El-Tahawi in Tahta, El-Rubi in Fayoum and El-Sayed Horiya in Beni Suef.

In addition, *Al-Ahram* was also present at one *moulid* which had been recently inaugurated. Originating in 1891 in Abu Homos where, "the *moulid* of Sidi Youssef, whose tomb is located in Koin Desouss, attracted a throng of about 10,000 people."

The age-old tradition of *moulids* celebrated by Egyptians of the 19th century requires some elucidation. *Moulids* are the product of a blend of veneration for the family of the Prophet and the rituals of the Sufi orders. This is epitomised in the *moulid* of El-Husseini in Cairo, the origins of which El-Jabarti attempts to explain in his annals. He writes, "This *moulid* was initiated by El-Sayed El-Badawi ibn Faith Mubashir, the director of the Mashhad waqf (religious endowment) foundation. Afflicted by the Frankish pox, he pledged himself to consecrate this *moulid* if God restored him to health. Indeed, he made some recovery and thus initiated the *moulid*. He lit some lamps in the mosque and arranged for some sheikhs to recite the Qur'an in the *madrasa* in the daytime and in the mosque in the evening. Then the phenomenon increased when they were joined by numerous Sufis from the Afifi, Samman, Arabi and Issawi societies. They would form circles and chant the names of Allah, sing poems venerating Him or recite verses from the *Burda* Al-Madhi of Busiri which others would echo in response, as a form of prayer to the Prophet, may peace be upon him."

El-Jabarti's account highlights another reason why *moulids* became so popular — the belief that the spirit of the person to whom the *moulid* is dedicated can perform miracles such as restoring health, inflicting calamity on a foe, curing impotency, solving personal financial difficulties or softening the heart of that long desired suitor. Perhaps this explains the phenomenon of the pledges box that would fill up with monetary dedications which, not infrequently, would provoke squabbles among those who divided the money, as one learns from numerous such reports in *Al-Ahram*.

It is interesting to note that, for the Sufi orders, the location of a saint's tomb was not as important as their relative numbers in a specific area. The Rifa'i Sufis, for example, convoked two *moulids*, one next to the El-Shafie Mosque in Cairo and another in Port Said, where "a long procession of Sufi masters and their followers would pass through the main thoroughfares of the city until it reached the square in which the *moulid* was held. There, people would recite the Qur'an and commemorate verses after which sweets and drinks would be distributed." As for the Maghazi order, they held two *moulids* in honour of their saint, El-Maghazi. One was in Bulqas, attended on occasion by an *Al-Ahram* correspondent who wrote, "There were so many people that I felt that I could have been in the *Al-Badawi* *moulid*. Some people estimated that there were over 200,000 visitors." The other *moulid* was held in Kafi El-Dawar where, as

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*Moulids* not only offered occasion for both worship and fun, they provided optimum opportunity for those on the fringes of Egyptian society to gain a livelihood — thieves, pickpockets and prostitutes. In this instalment of his chronicle of modern Egyptian history as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq looks at the vibrant world of *moulids* which attracted people of all walks for the purpose of religious homage, commerce, amusement or debauchery

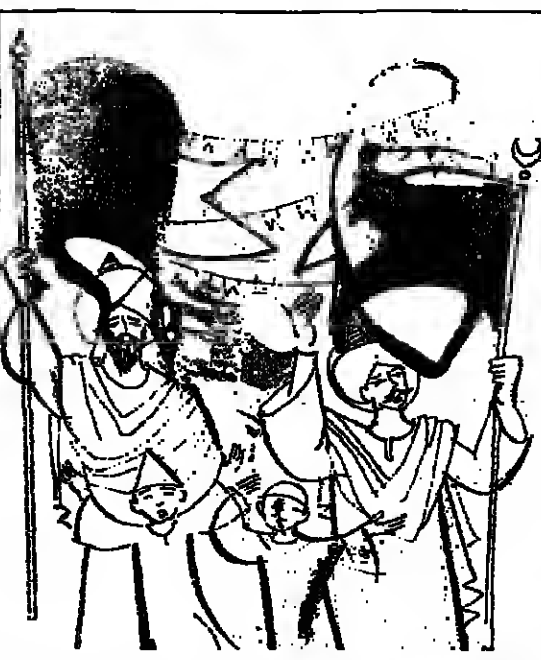


Illustration: Makram Henein

another correspondent wrote, "the celebrations are of such a fine magnitude that even very prominent people continue to make their way here from all quarters of the country."

The Copts too had their own *moulids*. Generally held near Coptic monasteries these commemorated such saints as Sayeda Damiyana in Bulqas and Marmina El-Agabyi. This latter *moulid* was "convoked by Coptic nobles in the monasteries lasting three days, attracting visitors from all parts and during which a horse race was held". Last but not least was the *moulid* of the Virgin Mary held in Daqadus near Mit Ghamr.

Coptic *moulids* also attracted many Muslims. Not only were there abundant opportunities for trade and commerce in the swarming markets near the *moulids*, many believed that certain saints venerated by the Copts had powerful healing powers or could exorcise evil jinn. The *moulid* held for Mari Girgis (Saint George) is famous for this.

*Moulids* were also an occasion for the rich to demonstrate their generosity, by holding benefits for the poor. Reporting on the *moulid* of El-Husseini in 1894, *Al-Ahram* writes, "The eminent Mohamed Abdel-Khaleq Hashem Bey hosted a celebration today in honour of our master El-Husseini. He adorned his home with splendid decorations, prepared a luxurious feast for which he slaughtered many animals and distributed alms and gifts among the poor and needy."

Not all *moulids*, we discover in *Al-Ahram*, were associated with religious figures or

Sufi orders. Rather they commemorated ancestral Bedouin figures. An example of this is the *moulid* of Sheikh Abu Ugaila in the province of Beheira "to which flock numerous visitors and elegantly arrayed Bedouin horsemen sporting swords. There was a horse race won by the steed belonging to the Bedouin chief Khalil Shahib El-Ashhab. The descendants of Abu Ugaila received visitors with warmth and generosity, may God bring prosperity and blessings to them."

While the motives behind *moulids* vary, they share certain characteristics. The most notable is large crowds. *Al-Ahram* gives no specific figures for the total visitors to El-Sayed El-Badawi's *moulid* in Tanta. But from the figures it cited for the numbers of people who came to this *moulid* by train in 1891 (10,000) one can surmise that the total visitors numbered several hundred thousands, most of whom would have arrived by their own means of transport from nearby villages.

Such masses of people would require administrative control, which was precisely the purpose of the Ministry of Interior's organisational statute of 1893. Promulgated with the approval of the provincial director of Gharbiya on the occasion of the *moulid* of El-Badawi, the 15-article statute reveals much about all the preparations *moulids* require.

Firstly, provision had to be made for the enormous numbers of tents that visitors brought with them as temporary abode. According to *Al-Ahram* of 1895, there were

4,000 tents that year, a thousand more than the previous year. With such numbers, questions of sanitation, health and cleanliness meant that people could not be left to set up their tents anywhere they pleased. Instead, a special camping site was designated for them "to the south of the city, directly behind the railroad tracks". The statute also regulated how the visitors' camp was to be organised and maintained. Rows of tents were to be separated by streets. Streets passing from east to west had to be 10 metres wide, and north-to-south streets had to be 15 metres wide. The campers were responsible for all aspects of cleanliness. Not only did they have to keep their tents clean, they had to sweep and spray the portion of the street in front of their tents. They were also prohibited from slaughtering animals. "All animals must be slaughtered at the slaughter house," the statute ordered.

The statute included numerous other provisions. People were "forbidden to sleep in the streets, alleyways and mosques within the city." Another article stipulated that "all games must be located within an area allocated for that purpose and designated beforehand." One is reminded here of Salah Jahin's famous operetta *Al-Laila Al-Kobra* (The Big Night) and the numerous amusements and contests — swings, weightlifting, target shooting, puppet-shows, among many others — children and adults could take part in. Virtually synonymous with the *moulid* is the traditional boiled chickpeas. According to the statute, chickpea cookers were "to remain in their regular stalls and forbidden to operate outside of these stalls."

The latter stipulation brings us to that major concomitant feature of *moulids* — commerce. Again we are lacking statistics in this aspect. However, we are assisted by the complaints the merchants would register if it so happened that the government temporarily banned a *moulid*, although generally there was a compelling reason for this such as a cholera epidemic. In its 4 August, 1891 edition, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Tanta helps to vent the merchants' frustration. "The suspension of this great *moulid* for two years running has been severely detrimental to merchants in Tanta, particularly those who sell Moroccan fabrics and Syrian and European goods. The astute observer should have no difficulty in perceiving that merchants and tavern owners are sharply critical of the yearly fees that they must pay for their shops and stalls. Their only hope is that the money that comes so dearly out of their pockets can be compensated for by playing their businesses and wares during the *moulid* season. Yet now many are in such difficult straits due to the current slump that they cannot afford to pay the rents on their stalls and shops."

Merchants were not the only ones whose livelihood depended upon *moulids*. A severe slump such as that described above would also affect those dependent upon the monetary pledges donated by worshippers. And when the pickings get slim, the rivalries over the booty become harsher. Several articles in *Al-Ahram* from October and November 1893 illustrate this. In October, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Tanta writes,

"The professors, scholars and custodians of the Sayed Badawi Mosque are awaiting the distribution of the money that has been donated in the pledges boxes by generous and virtuous citizens. Several disputes have arisen over how the money is to be distributed. Some want it to be distributed according to the relative ranks of the individuals who are entitled to the money whereas others maintain that it should be distributed according to the regulations." The agency responsible for the distribution of the money was the Waqf Foundation Administration and the newspaper urged the director to resolve the disputes "in a manner that ensures the rights of all". A month later the correspondent reports that "the intensity of the disputes between the scholars and custodians of the mosque has increased." In the end, the Waqf Administration had to dispatch its senior inspector, Ismail Bey El-Burai who finally settled the dispute to the satisfaction of all parties.

Like Al-Jabarti, *Al-Ahram* also vented its anger against manifestations of "depravity". The newspaper's Tanta correspondent criticised "the shamelessness of the prostitutes and their licentious dancing in the coffeehouses. Yet this is nothing compared to the male dancers, one of whom we saw dressed in women's costume, down to the earrings, anklets and belt around the hips. We have also seen men intermingling with women in the chanting circles in which they sing, dance and behave in general with an immodesty that contravenes all law and offends all sense of decorum and morals."

The correspondent from Dammanhur sounds equally perturbed when reporting on the *moulid* of Sidi Atiya Abul-Rish where "we saw coffeehouses in which there was dancing, hashish smoking and every form of depravity that offends one's sense of modesty and all this directly next to the Mosque of Atiya Abul-Rish. In addition, prostitutes have taken up residence in huts along all the thoroughfares. Nor do they attempt to conceal their villainous from visitors and passers-by, since their presence there is sanctioned by the government which takes rent on these huts."

Even in Qena in Upper Egypt, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent expresses his shock and dismay at "the many activities offensive to public morals that are occurring in the hashish and dancing coffeehouses".

*Moulids*, in which there is such a conglomeration of mankind, not only offered occasion for either worship or fun, they provided optimum opportunity for those on the fringes of Egyptian society to gain a livelihood. Thieves and pickpockets in particular could hardly afford to miss the abundant booty they could get by deftly mingling with the jostling crowds. For their victims, it would have been small comfort to know that this practice continues in the *moulids* held in Egypt down to the present day.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

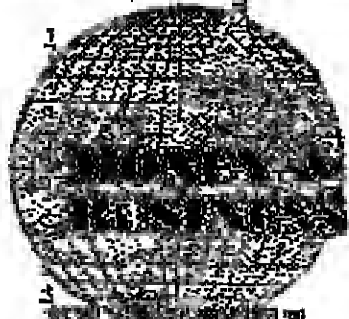


## Developing small institutions

Gamal El-Bayoumi, aide to the Egyptian foreign minister, will oversee the Egyptian side in a series of meetings to be held in Milano discussing means of developing small and medium-sized institutions and industries.

Egypt is one of 27 countries sending experts to participate in the meetings.

## MONEY & BUSINESS



## LE3bn in Gulf War reparations

The UN Reparations Committee in Geneva approved the allocation of LE3bn in reparations to be paid to Egyptians who suffered losses, Munir Zahran, Egypt's permanent representative at the United Nations, stated.

Zahran added that 1,230,000 Egyptian workers had deposits in Iraqi banks when the Gulf War broke out. It is expected that paying reparations will start in January.

\$ 500 million authorized capital



\$100 million issued and paid up capital

## Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

Pioneer of Islamic Banking

### announces

for investment account depositors that the profits of the bank's transactions carried out in the first quarter of 1416 A.H ending 18/5/96 will be distributed on 12/6/1996

### Local currency:

1- Investment accounts for no less than

2 years 2.52%

2- Investment accounts

2.02%

### Foreign currency:

1.15%

The total distributable profits until

18/5/1996 is LE 275.5 million

## Minister of finance: No privatisation rush

Speaking before the Parliament, Mohamed Gharib, minister of finance, stated that the government will not precipitate the sale of public sector companies and that the revenue will be channelled to the financing of vital projects.

Gharib also stated that taxes would not increase due to the recent trade boom which has increased tax revenues. This is keeping in line with the government's policy which takes into consideration those falling within the lower income brackets.

Concerning privatisation, Gharib explained that the goal of privatisation is aimed at improving the companies' status and performance, rather than selling them and laying off workers.

In other developments, Gharib explained that while the government's policy is currently that of subsidising the purchase of wheat, moving towards self-sufficiency is a goal which is hoped to be realised soon.

## Mohandes Insurance Co.

On 16 June, 1996 Mohandes Insurance Co. will begin distribution of 200 thousand free shares to its shareholders, giving one dividend share for every 10 shares.

Samir Mustafa Metwalli, chairman of the board of Mohandes Insurance

Co., explained that distribution of the dividend shares will be implemented in light of a decision made at an extraordinary general assembly held on 28 December 1995, which called for an LE2mn increase in paid capital which is to be trans-

ferred from the general reserves and distributed among the shareholders in the form of dividend shares.

The chairman of the board said the shareholder has the right to claim his dividend shares until the end of the day following the dis-

tribution. Metwalli said that the company will announce during the forthcoming period the opening of subscriptions to increase the company's capital by 800 thousand shares, valued at LE8mn, which is intended to increase the paid capital to LE30mn.

## Mutual funds granted tax exemptions

Other items to be discussed is the income tax amendment bill. Upon approval, the proposed tax exemption is expected to encourage small investors to invest in these funds. The tax exemption is aimed at 40 per cent.

Another bill presented by the government is one which would cancel the securities' profit tax. The aim of this bill is to boost investment.

## Tourism conference in Sharm El-Sheikh

Egypt was selected by the Faculty of Tourism and Commerce in Hungary to host an international tourism conference which will be held from 24-26 July at Sharm El-Sheikh. The conference, which aims to discuss means of improving tourist services, is being organised by the Tourism and Commerce Faculty of Hungary, in cooperation with the Faculty of Tourism at Suez Canal University.

Ahmed Duweidar, president of Suez Canal University and chairman of the conference, stated that more than 80 faculties of tourism from different countries of the world will take part, in addition to a large number of tourism ministers and over 200 experts in the field.

## A privatisation offer

A leading international automobile manufacturing company submitted an offer to the Egyptian government proposing the privatisation of three public sector companies operating in the field of manufacturing automobile tyres, Atef Ebeld, minister of the public business sector, stated.

Ebeld added that the quality of these company's products is on par with other international companies, qualifying them to merge with other international companies in the same field. Ebeld is scheduled to discuss the offer with the minister of industry.

## Developing remote villages

Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of the Youth and Sports Supreme Council, confirmed that a sum of LE 3.5mn will be allocated to the remote villages development project. The project's preliminary stages has resulted in developing 70 villages and has employed 20,000 youths.

On the other hand, 4 thousand youth centres were opened nationwide, including libraries, in addition to the youth groups, which involves 50,000 of Upper Egypt's fresh graduates and undergraduates.



# Ibrahim Atlanta bound

Africa's best rowers took to the Nile last week to earn their places in the Olympics, including African champion Ali Ibrahim. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab reports



Ali Ibrahim rowing his way to Atlanta

Last week, the Nile's early morning calm was broken by three rowing races, as Egypt, Algeria, Zimbabwe and South Africa took part in the African continental qualifications for Atlanta. Among those taking part was Ali Ibrahim, ranked among the world's top 20, and Egypt's brightest rowing hope.

Egypt was the natural choice as a site for the qualifications. As well as the natural advantage of the River Nile, Egypt was the first African country to join the International Rowing Federation (IRF), in 1907, and hosts the headquarters of the African Rowing Federation.

"The International Olympic Committee has reduced the number of rowers allowed to take part to 604, and they must fulfil certain cri-

teria," explained Shaker Tawfik, former secretary-general of the Egyptian Rowing Federation and the world's oldest living international umpire. The competitors, he continued, should be the strongest rowers from each of the five continents. The world's top 12 rowers have carte blanche to join the Olympics, but the others must pass their continental qualification heats, and fulfill the Olympic Committee's criteria.

Even Egypt's and Africa's top rower, Ali Ibrahim, did not escape the qualifications. Being African Champion, fourth in the World Cup and 17th in the World Championship did not exempt him from having to prove his worth to the selectors.

However, he fulfilled expectations with a resounding win in the

men's skiff (singles), putting his name on a ticket to Atlanta. "I'm very happy to win this race," he commented afterwards, "proving to myself, in front of others, that I am the best in Africa."

Ibrahim had been rowing abroad up to three weeks before the qualifications, taking part in six championships in three countries — Italy, Belgium and Germany. Back in Egypt, he rows five hours a day, does five hours of exercises on rowing machines, and eats and sleeps well. He will travel to the US early, and spend a couple of weeks training in Pennsylvania before moving south to Atlanta.

"At this stage, his performance is 70 or 80 per cent," said Amr Ragaei, his coach. "But by the time we get to Atlanta he will be 100 per cent ready."

However, the experienced Shaker Tawfik is not expecting miracles. "The world's best 18 rowers will be taking part in the skiff," he said. "Realistically speaking, I think taking from seventh to 12th place would be a good achievement for Ibrahim. He hasn't got the experience of a lot of the people he'll be racing against."

Meanwhile, South Africa won the coxless pairs, and, in the surprise of the qualifications, Algeria won the women's skiff, winning an Olympic rowing place for the first time in 12 years.

So Ibrahim alone will row for Egypt in Atlanta. He will be the seventh Egyptian rower to take part in the Olympics. So far, none of them have won a medal. Despite his youth and inexperience, could Ibrahim be the first?

## Arab contractors hang on

Zamalek is through to the quarterfinals of one of Africa's premier championships, the Club Champions Cup, and Arab Contractors have made it into the last eight of the Cup Winners Cup.

The draws for the three Confederation of African Football (CAF) inter-club competitions, held in Cairo last week, set the ball rolling for the final showdown between the eight qualifiers in each of the competitions, which started with a total of 132 clubs.

In the fight for the Club Champions Cup, Zamalek will clash with CODM of Morocco, CS Sfaxien of Tunisia will meet Jaraaf de Dakar of Senegal and Petrol Atletico of Angola will play against JS Kabylie of Algeria. The winner of the rescheduled match between Orlando Pirates of South Africa and Mafela of Zambia will meet Shooting Stars of Nigeria.

In the Cup Winners Cup, Arab Contractors of Egypt will slug it out with FUS of Morocco, CR Belouizoid of Algeria meet Pretoria City of South Africa and Canon of Cameroon is pitched against Costa do Sol of Mozambique. The winner of another rescheduled match between Mbilings of Gabon and Katsina United of Nigeria will play Sogidraf of Zaire.

Meanwhile, in the CAF Cup, USST of Reunion meet KACM of Morocco, Breweries of Kenya is matched

against Ports Authority of Sierra Leone, ESS of Tunisia meets Unisport Bafang of Cameroon and AS Vita of Zaire challenges MC Oran of Algeria.

"A wonderful draw as well as a tough one for the clubs," commented Mawade Wade, the Jaraaf coach, who is confident that CS Sfaxien will pose no threat to Jaraaf's road to the Champions Cup. The Senegalese team is attempting to bring home the prestigious trophy for the first time, and while their chances are thought to be thin, their previous performances, including knocking out the major ASEC of Cote d'Ivoire, shows that they are a force to be reckoned with.

The encounter between the Shooting Stars and the winner of the Orlando Pirates-Mafela match is certain to be interesting. If the Stars play Mafela, it will be a first meeting between the two teams, so neither side will know what to expect. On the other hand, if defending champions Orlando Pirates meet the Shooting Stars as expected, it is likely to be one of the most explosive matches of the year. Such a meeting would mark the first soccer match between Nigeria and South Africa since the Nations Cup in South Africa, when Nigeria was banned following its execution of a leading human rights activist.

"Shooting Stars watch out! The Pirates are also interested in the Champions Cup," warned Barry Lambert, a

South African club representative who was present at the draw. Zamalek gave a similar threat, should Shooting Stars go through to the later stages. "I know too much about the improvement of Nigerian football. Shooting Stars will have to be ready for us, and must not forget that we beat them 1-0 in Nigeria," said Samir Sayed, the Zamalek manager. The Shooting Stars, meanwhile, are determined to win the Cup, which has eluded Nigeria since its inception 32 years ago.

Zamalek — who won this cup in 1984 and 1993, accounting for two of Egypt's six wins — are playing their first leg match at home with a virtually unknown side, CODM of Morocco. "We are starting to collect information about this team today, because we don't know anything about them," reported Sayed. Zamalek, he added, was currently on the lookout for new players of the quality of their former star Emmanuel Amunike, who is currently set to move from Sporting Lisbon of Portugal to Barcelona of Spain.

In the Cup Winners Cup, Egypt's Arab Contractors will play their first leg away against another Moroccan team, FUS. The Contractors, twice champions in 1982 and 1983, are as optimistic as ever, and their German coach Michael Kruger is looking forward to adding more weight to the Contractors' attack. "I am happy that we

will be playing the second leg at home," he said. "The quarterfinal will actually take place next season and just now we are trying to get new players, particularly some very good centre forwards." He was not, however, prepared to reveal their identity.

Another team to watch in the Cup Winners Cup is Pretoria City, a South African second division club which remained unbeaten last season until a 3-2 upset by a Cape Town side in the South African finals. Pretoria's next opponent is CR Belouizoid of Algeria. "I think we've got a very difficult draw, but we can still win. Hold them to a draw in Algeria, take them home to South Africa and beat them," said Barry Lambert, a club representative present at the draw. "We are lucky because we took five new signings at the end of last season. They were ineligible to play in the previous rounds, but now we can bring them into the squad."

Meanwhile, in the CAF Cup, defending champions ESS of Tunisia remain very much in control. Their quarterfinal opponents are Unisport Bafang of Cameroon, a team recognised as no pushover since their defeat of Nigeria's Ranger International. Also waiting in the wings to challenge the Tunisians are USST of Reunion, who are silently inching their way to the top after a surprise win over Sundowns of South Africa.

## Olympic technology



By  
Yousef  
Mazhar

More than 10,000 athletes from 197 countries will shortly be converging on Atlanta to compete in 26 Olympic sports, ranging from athletics to synchronised swimming, to yachting. This, of course, will create an enormous challenge for logistics and information technology.

To meet this challenge, systems have been devised, both to help manage and run the event and to meet the viewing demands of millions of television viewers all around the world.

Officials and judges will contribute to the Games Results System, which will allow the split-second dissemination of information by pen-based computers complete with user-friendly graphical guides. Complex computer skills are not required to operate the system, and training will be given just before the games.

Another system, called INFO 96, will deliver graphical and text-based information on the Olympics through one thousand touch-screen terminals. Instead of using a keyboard, users simply touch the logos appearing on the screen.

Information available via the system will include results, which will be available immediately, schedules of events, and even the results and performances of past years. Information can be accessed by name of athlete, sporting event, year, and is available in English and French.

And, to provide information on the Internet, IBM has developed a home page to provide information on the games. Internet users the world over can take a break from office routing to check up on the Olympics results on the World Wide Web at <http://www.atlanta.olympic.org>.

The events of the 17 days of the 1996 Olympics will thus be available more immediately and more accurately, to those who attend the event, to judges, to the millions watching on television, and to those connected to the Internet. To use the cutting edge of modern technology to satisfy the demands of all these groups is the challenge of technology at the Olympics.

The writer is president of the Egyptian Yachting and Windsurfing Federation.

## Olympics countdown

### All in oils

A LIMITED-EDITION painting of Mohamed Ali winning his 1960 Olympic boxing gold medal will be unveiled today at a private reception in Atlanta. Ali, still known as Cassius Clay when he won the title, was captured on canvas by artist Steve Kaufman in tribute to the centennial Olympic Games next month. The reception will be hosted by Ali and Kaufman.

### Right on time

ANTHONY Hembrick, the American boxer who arrived too late for his first fight at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, is to be an Atlanta Games volunteer whose duties will include making sure athletes arrive on time. Hembrick was disqualified after his late arrival in the ring at Seoul, the result of a misunderstanding of the competition schedule.

### Errands by air

FEARS of an Olympic-size gridlock have prompted a US government scheme to use helicopters to run errands during the Games, combined with technology to ensure that they do not choke the skies with traffic as well. The \$10 million project, paid for by the Federal Aviation Administration, NASA and private companies, will keep track of 50 helicopters, ferrying goods and emergency help around Atlanta during the Olympics. The plan is called the Atlanta Short Haul Transportation System.

### Arab Games delayed

ARAB youth and sports ministers decided on Monday to postpone the Arab Games, to be held in Beirut, for a year. The games will now take place in October 1997.

The decision followed talks at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo with representatives from Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon.

Abdel-Monem Emara, head of Egypt's Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, announced the decision. "The delay is due to the Israeli aggression against Lebanon which has held up the organisation of the games," he told reporters after the meeting. "In addition, several Arab countries have not paid the dues they promised to Beirut to rebuild its sports infrastructure."

Lebanon has said it needs \$72.5 million to rebuild sports facilities destroyed in its long civil war. So far, Saudi Arabia has contributed \$20 million and Kuwait \$6.3 million.

Lebanon itself has paid \$23 million towards rebuilding, but Lebanon's Sports Minister Robert Ghannem warned that his country would be unable to host the games if other Arab nations did not honour their commitments to provide extra funding.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

## Graf does it again

THE 1996 Roland Garros Grand Slam ended with one surprise win and one classic victory.

The most exciting tennis was played in the women's tournament, where Germany's defending champion Steffi Graf gave herself an early 27th birthday present by beating old rival Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain 6-3, 6-7(4-7), 10-8 in a record three hours and four minutes of nail-biting tennis, watched by 17,500 spectators.

But if the women's competition ended in traditional fashion, with Graf taking her fifth French Open, giving her a total of 19 grand slam titles, more than any previous player with the exception of Margaret Court, the men's competition was a different story.

Playing in his first grand slam final, Yevgeny Kafelnikov beat 16th ranked Michael Stich, 7-6, 7-5, 7-6. Kafelnikov outlasted his opponent with his powerful baseline play spiced with winning returns and a few raging volleys. Not only did he make history for Russia with his singles win. He also won the doubles final with Czech partner Daniel Vacek on Saturday, thus becoming the first player to win both titles on the Paris clay since Australian Ken Rosewall in 1968. (photos: AP)



## Egypt goes Euro-mad

FOOTBALL fans have been glued to their TV screens to watch the giants of Europe clash in Euro 96, which kicked off last Saturday at Wembley Stadium, England, writes Eric Asomugha.

Last Saturday, England and Switzerland kicked off the first match of Euro 96, the biggest football event to be held in Britain since 1966. The match ended in a 1-1 draw, a disappointing start for the hosts, whose fans are demanding a return to the kind of form that won England the 1966 World Cup.

This year's European Nations Championships are the largest ever, with 16 nations taking part. The number will be narrowed down to eight for the quarterfinals on 23 June, and the finalists will emerge after the semi-finals on 26 June. The champion will be

decided at Wembley on 30 June. So far the Euro 96 is trouble-free. The British government, relieved by this, said on Sunday that it hopes Euro 96 will pave the way for a bid for the World Cup in 2006 and the Olympic Games two years later.

Thanks to daily television coverage, Egyptians have caught Euro-football mania too, and results prediction has become a conversational standard in taxis, coffeehouses and homes across the country. Nile TV is even offering a car as a prize for correctly guessing the two finalists.

Two matches will be played today: Switzerland versus Holland in group A, and Bulgaria versus Romania in group B. Matches are shown on Channel 2 and Nile TV.

## Sidelines: Euro 96

**Golden goal**  
For the first time in the history of the Euro '96 competition, the golden goal rule will be applied. This rule states that in the case of a tied second round match, the first goal scored, wins.

**Tickets**  
More than 90 per cent of tickets for Euro 96 have already been sold, leaving only 130,000 for other eager fans to snap up. Nine of the remaining 27 games are sold out and another four nearly sold out.

**Gambling**  
An over-eager gambler stands to win one million pounds Sterling

(\$1.5 million) if Spain meets Italy in the Euro '96 final on 30 June. The punter placed a 50,000 pound, 20-1 bet (\$76,690) in a London bookmaker shop on these two teams reaching the final. This is so far the biggest bet to be placed in this competition.

**Fair play**  
The UEFA (European Football Federation) expressed its concern recently at the high number of red and yellow cards produced in the early stages of Euro '96. Referees, however, have been told to maintain their "tough but fair" attitude to foul play at the championship.





## Ibrahim Saadeddin: Social strategist

His name has often been linked with the aura of the Nasser years and the technocracy of the socialist state. But he is hardly your average grey man in a suit. His smile is sheer electricity. All the teeth show. It is a wide, white grin

Born in Sharqiya, Ibrahim Saadeddin spent his school years accompanying his father, a member of the judicial corps, to the different towns where he was posted. The final destination was Cairo, where Saadeddin enrolled at Foad I (now Cairo) University's Faculty of Commerce, studying management and business administration. Some time in 1945, his senior year, he became a fervent supporter of the left-wing movement which was stirring the university and the country.

Saadeddin graduated with honours and joined the faculty staff, maintaining his involvement in the radical movement of the period. He wrote articles in *Al-Fagr Al-Gadid*, a Marxist publication edited and published by Ahmed Rashedi Saleh. In 1951, he left for the US to study for his Ph.D. His wife joined him there, and their eldest son, Hossam (now a leading consultant for in vitro fertilisation and embryo transfer in the UK), was born shortly thereafter. Upon completion of his studies in 1955, Saadeddin returned home, to the republic Egypt had become. He resumed his teaching post at what was by this time the University of Cairo, and re-established contact with left-wing activists. He was arrested in February 1956 under charges of membership in the underground communist movement.

On 18 June, 1956, the Constitution was promulgated and martial law abolished. Saadeddin was released on 2 July, in time to rejoice with his compatriots over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

Great changes were taking place in the country and the services of cultured, dedicated Egyptians were in great demand. Though he had been arrested on political grounds, his organisational expertise was sought by the regime. His name constantly headed the list of organisers considered to have particular know-how in the creation and management of new institutions. He was appointed advisor to the Ministry of Education for a short spell, then delegated to the Ministry of Planning to assist Dr Ibrahim Helmi Abdel-Rahman in founding the Institute of National Planning, where he also became a professor. He was then asked to help establish the National Institute for Business Administration, where again he was on the teaching staff. "The regime aimed at raising the standard of the layman by creating new establishments to widen the horizons for young people. As leftists we were very amenable to this goal and helped in any way we could."

Saadeddin soon found his niche in the higher echelons of the new regime's technocratic administration. When Prime Minister Zakaria Mubieddin decided to restructure the Auditing Bureau (*Diwan Al-Muhasaba*), re-named the Central Organisation for Auditing, he was nominated deputy director. When the Arab Socialist Union was created, he was made a member of the General Secretariat. He helped create the Institute of Socialist Studies, and became its first dean.

The aim of the Institute of Socialist Studies was to politically train and educate the cadres sent there by the General Secretariat

of the Arab Socialist Union. The nominees were from different walks of life — high-ranking officials, peasants, workers and intellectuals. They were screened by the institute's staff, who determined their ability to assimilate the goals of the institute and also to make sure they were interested in the affairs of their community.

The theoretical part of the institute's programme was designed to acquaint the fledgling cadres with the constitution, the achievements of the 1952 revolution and the economic and political development of Egypt. The cadres were divided into small groups and sent to different parts of the country, where they had practical opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge. They visited factories, unions and villages where the agricultural reform had been implemented, and held discussions in order to better acquaint themselves with the problems people were facing. "Reporting these observations and the discussions that took place within the group had the additional targeted effect of maturing these individuals' thoughts and behaviour," Saadeddin recalls.

Following the 1968 student riots in outrage at the lenient sentence handed to the Air Force officers considered responsible for the 1967 debacle, the Arab Socialist Union was re-structured. Saadeddin laughs: "We were informed of our resignations." Saadeddin returned to the Central Organisation for Auditing and to teaching — The Institute of Socialist Studies closed down shortly after.

But this was not the last time Saadeddin was to rub the authorities the wrong way. He was among those who were arrested during Sadat's well-known "Corrective Revolution". He was brought to trial before a revolutionary court and convicted, but received a one-year stay of execution. Shortly after, he was nominated by the UN to found the Arab Institute for Planning in Kuwait. He remained in Kuwait for eight years.

"Until 1981 [the year he returned to Egypt], I had been employed to create new establishments, but upon my return from Kuwait, these public appointments came to an end, and I joined the Third World Forum as director of the regional office."

Chaired by the prominent economist Ismail Sabri Abdallah, the Forum, as Saadeddin explains, is basically a conglomerate of social scientists, scholars and researchers interested in the social problems of the Third World. Affiliated to no government, party or establishment, it has no regular source of financing, subsisting instead on research contracts for different organisations. All the members are from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Before leaving for Kuwait, Saadeddin was instrumental in drawing up the Forum's plan of work.

"Alternative Arab Futures", one of the major futurology projects the Forum undertook for the UN University in Tokyo, took five years to carry out and gives an idea of the diversity of subjects tackled by the researchers: democracy, the political impact of

the oil boom of the 1970s, Arab cinema, Arabic literature and its role in unity and diversity... Scholars from different parts of the Arab world contributed; the Forum's report, based on their findings, outlined anticipated scenarios for the evolution of the Arab world.

Other major projects: "The Islamic Movement in the Arab World", "The Progressive Movement in the Arab World", "How Decisions Are Taken in the Arab World", "The Islamic Awakening", and "Women's Illiteracy in Egypt".

While in Kuwait, Saadeddin put his name on the list of the founders of the Left Forum, one of the offspring of Sadat's decision to dissolve the Arab Socialist Union into three forums — Right, Left and Centre. It was a step which launched Egypt on a multi-party system course after two decades of one-party rule. Upon his return from Kuwait in 1981, he became a member of the General Secretariat of the Left Forum, by then established as Al-Tagammu (the Nationalist Progressive Unionist Party). Within the party, he staunchly advocated an Egyptian new left movement, free from the limiting orthodox views of an opposition movement shaped by the constraints of secret underground struggle.

Throughout the 1980s, Saadeddin remained a dynamic intellectual force behind many of the debates raging in Egypt and the Arab world over the left's need for a new strategy which would take rapidly changing realities into account. He continues to write profusely in the local and Arab press and has published a number of books, including *The Crisis of the Socialist Bloc* perhaps his best known, and most valuable, contribution.

Opting for a quieter life, Saadeddin resigned not long ago from the General Secretariat of the Tagammu, retaining only his place on the Political Committee. With characteristic candour, he says that "the younger members of the party should have more of a say in its present affairs: they are quite capable of shouldering the responsibility."

Saadeddin does not feel bitter about the various hardships inflicted by his involvement in politics. He mentions events with his habitual smile. Under Sadat, his children found themselves in unpleasant situations due to his past — but they are no quicker than he to complain.

He is today a figure of authority, quoted even by those social scientists who express scepticism as to his convictions. He has navigated the waters of the times and weathered the disavowal of the regime. But he was never overly perturbed, not even by the collapse of the Soviet Union. "I am often asked whether the events in the Socialist bloc shattered my convictions. It goes without saying that the collapse of the Socialist bloc shocked all socialists, but it did not induce a basic transformation of my convictions. On the contrary, I fully and fervently believe in socialist goals. But these events confirmed my conviction that the theoretical and executive principles of socialism should be revised and studied critically; and, where practice proved ineffective in achieving these goals, practice should be altered."

Profile by Samia Abdenour

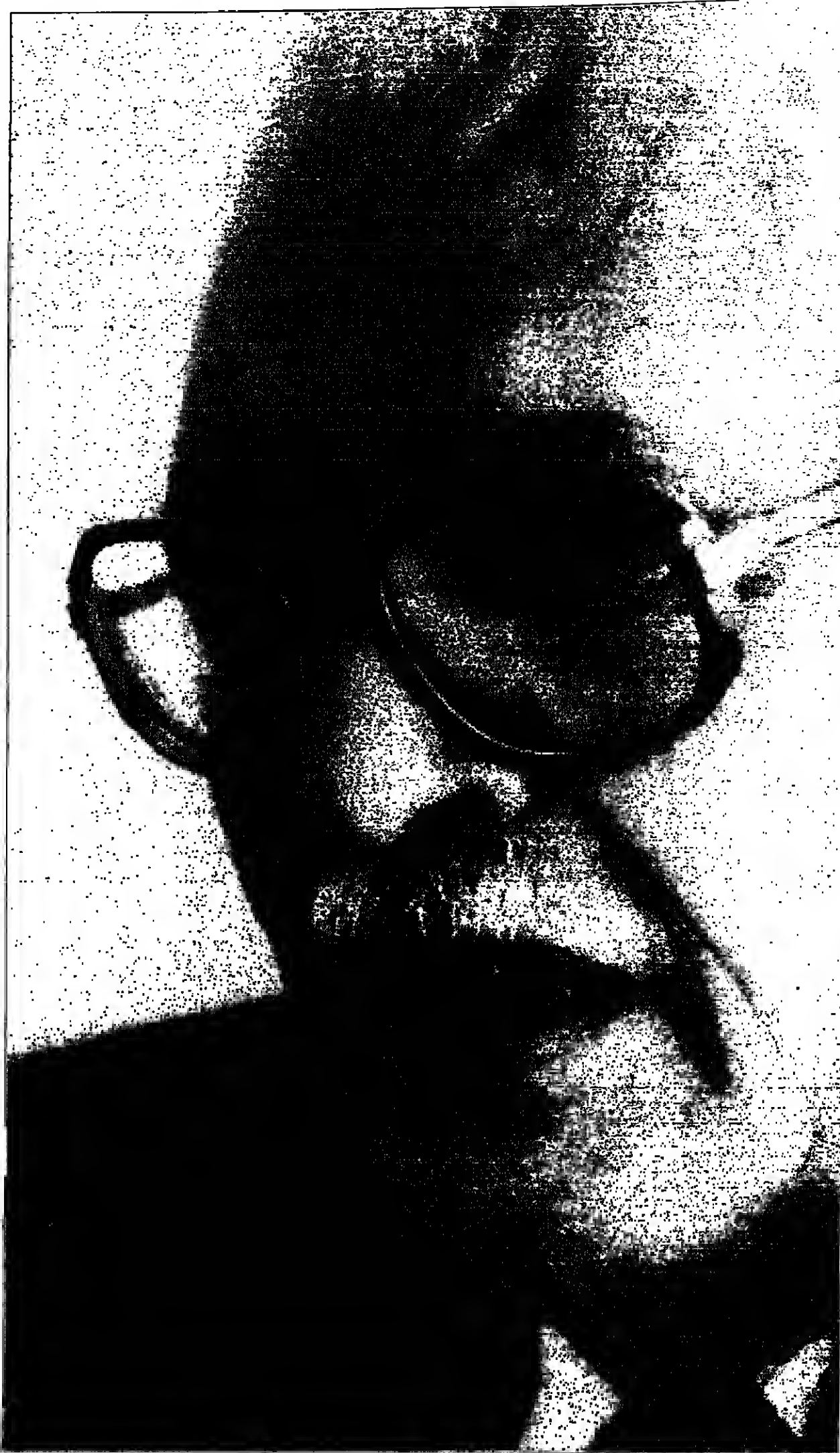


Photo: Mohamed Wasseem

## Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostri

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I was there in 1976 when the International Language Institute was opened by minister of tourism, Mustafa Kamel Helmi, British ambassador William Morris and the Institute's director, Colin Davis. And so it is only fitting that I be there today at 3pm when British Ambassador David Blatherwick and the Institute's current director Paul Mason host an open day to celebrate

the Institute's twentieth anniversary. Knowing full well that it would be unwise for the guests to traipse around the Institute on an empty stomach, we will indulge in a celebratory lunch after the ambassador unveils the commemorative plaque, but before we are taken on a tour of the premises. The general public, I'm afraid — how I pity you so! — will have to wait until 4.30pm before

they will be allowed to see the place — unveiled, of course — for themselves.

It's by attending important occasions that also account for the making of history that gives me the greatest pleasure. There's no better feeling dears, than being given the opportunity to suck on the marrow of life while others are barely able to come near the bone. Last week I attended a luncheon reception at the Semiramis International which saw executive director of the AMOCO Oil Cooperation in Egypt Richard Flury hand over a cheque with the value of \$750,000 to AUC President Donald McDonald, under whose auspices the Theban Mapping Project is managed. The first of a five-part grant, this funding will support the continuing work in one of Egypt's major archaeological projects — the mapping of the entire Theban necropolis, including the largest tomb ever discovered, that of Ramesses II's sons in the Valley of the Kings. But that wasn't even the most exciting moment of the afternoon. Most of us were there for one thing and one thing alone.

It's no secret that AUC's professor of Egyptology and discoverer of the KV-5 tomb, Kent Weeks, has a special talent in holding an audience with his fascinating presentations. As interesting as McDonald's and Flury's speeches were as they welcomed AMOCO's President Charles Pittman, I admit that I did get a little impatient waiting for my friend to get up and give his own lecture, along with a fascinating slide presentation of the project's development. Quite honestly, I'd say that this was the highlight of the whole

occasion, and it seemed that the guests, including AUC and foreign and Egyptian media representatives, as well as my good friends and colleagues Jill Knull and Sylvia El-Nakady, agreed.

There must be over 500 foreign correspondents in Egypt. Over the years, I've managed to meet most of them at one event or another, and some have become good friends of mine. One of these correspondents is Thilo Koesler, Middle East correspondent of the German radio station ARD, which has been based in Cairo for the past 6 years. One cannot be good friends with someone for so many years without feeling a little distressed to hear that they will no longer be able to see them as regularly as they would want. Thilo is now leaving Egypt, and to say farewell to all his friends he hosted a delicious — if not cheerless — buffet dinner last week, where I met a number of colleagues from *Al-Ahram*, including renowned political columnist Salama Ahmed Salama and the *Weekly's* multi-talented Marri Saad El-Din. Chairman of the State Information Service Nabil Osman was also there to say good-bye, as was president of the Foreign Correspondents' Association, Folkhardt Wiadfur.



Blatherwick



Osman

From

rocking around the clock, to rocking the cradle: no more late nights, either at work or elsewhere, for my good friends and colleagues Shaden Shehab and Mohamed Habib, who are now the proud, if not exhausted, parents of the one-week-old bundle of joy, Merina. Many congratulations to them both.

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